

## Statelessness Unit Dakar Update: March/April 2014, UNHCR Regional Representation for West Africa

### UNHCR Country Action Plans

There have been more exciting developments since we were last in touch with you. First of all, we are pleased to tell you that our offices in Sierra Leone and in Benin have set up statelessness working groups in their respective countries in order to address issues of statelessness. **Sierra Leone** has already started to map the key causes and consequences of statelessness in the country and these will feed into the activities of their working group.

In **Benin**, the newly constituted working group brings together a number of traditional actors such as the government, UN agencies and civil society as well as non-traditional actors such as journalists to tackle the issue of statelessness in the country. The working group have agreed on a two-year action plan that sets out to identify the risk factors of statelessness, raise awareness on the issue and improve the legal and administrative framework relating to nationality issues. It is hoped that in doing this the country will be able to domesticate the standards of the two Statelessness Conventions that were signed by Benin in 2011. Protection Officer Pépin Glele believes this project will go some way towards putting statelessness on the agenda and giving a human face to what is currently an invisible issue in Benin. Read a newspaper report on statelessness that is posted on the UNHCR statelessness blog: <http://statelessapatride.wordpress.com>

### Country focus: Togo



One promising step towards the prevention of statelessness in Togo is the collaboration of UN agencies to strengthen civil registries and improve systems to issue nationality certificates and ID cards. The initiative, outlined in Togo's UN development assistance framework for 2014-2018, is an important step towards exercising fundamental rights linked to citizenship in Togo and preventing statelessness. In a visit to the National Human Rights Commission of Togo, the Statelessness Unit was briefed on the efforts that were underway to find solutions to statelessness through their work with local partners. UNHCR Togo is working closely with the Commission to encourage Togo to sign both the Statelessness Conventions and start to map the extent of statelessness in the country. More news of the meeting is available on the website of the Togolese Human Rights Commission: <http://www.cndh-togo.org/cndh-togo/articles/view.php/322/apatridie-une-delegation-du-hcr-a-echange-avec-la-cndh-sur-la-question>

### Partners: Progress made on prevention of statelessness in Liberia

Following our last update, a partner from the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) in **Liberia** replied to tell us that “...in Liberia we are spreading the message relative to statelessness as most people are not really aware of the trauma associated this problem”. When we met with Colonel Yebleh in Monrovia, he explained that since the last workshop that he attended on statelessness in 2013, he learnt that not only is it important to recognize **where** national legislation can create statelessness but also **how** to share this information so people do not become stateless without realizing it. Col. Yebleh told us that one key problem to obtaining Liberian nationality was the lack of clarity in administrative procedures. Over the last 6 months he and his colleagues in

the BIN have given training to immigration officers around the country to clarify these procedures. One visible result was seen in growing numbers of young Liberians coming to take their oath of allegiance to confirm their Liberian nationality, an administrative requirement for those born abroad and with no record of having lived in Liberia. To continue this commitment to eradicate statelessness, UNHCR are working with the Liberian government to make sure that the Statelessness Conventions that were signed and ratified by the country are harmonized in their current domestic law.

### Statelessness Media Training in Dakar



As you will no doubt see from the number of press-related links in this update, the media is an extremely important partner in communicating statelessness in the region. So, in order to ensure that we make the most of this collaboration we held a one-day Statelessness Media training event in Dakar for both Francophone and Anglophone journalists. Both days ended with country teams drawing up blueprints for stories on statelessness and deciding on which channels of communication they would use to disseminate their stories. For example Benin, Sierra Leone and Togo

decided to look at the impact of territorial disputes as a cause of statelessness whilst others such as Liberia and Mali chose to focus on the lack of safeguards for statelessness in their domestic legal frameworks. Most teams chose to use a variety of print, radio and on-line channels to publicize their investigations. If the news coverage of the training event is anything to go by, then we expect to soon see a number of strong investigative reports on statelessness in the region before June. Here are a few of the stories on the training event:

<http://www.foroyaa.gm/burning-issues/15357-700-000-people-are-stateless-in-west-africa-says-unhcr-expert> (Gambia) <http://observer.gm/africa/gambia/article/intl-training-exposes-sub-regional-journalists-to-statelessness> (Gambia) <http://www.sidwaya.bf/quotidien/spip.php?article19199> (Burkina Faso) <http://ww2.radionigeria.gov.ng/fc/news/01-7AM-NETWORK-NEWS-09-04-14.mp3> (Nigeria minute 27-30)

### Communique on statelessness from Ghana

On the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of March UNHCR Ghana held a statelessness workshop with members of the government, national NGOs, members of the academia and UN agencies. The event resulted in the adoption of a communiqué which provided a number of key recommendations for preventing statelessness in the country. The recommendations and the full communique are available on UNHCR RRWA statelessness blog <http://statelessapatride.wordpress.com>. Additional activities relating to UNHCR Ghana's activities on statelessness can be found on their official Twitter feed [@unhcrghana](https://twitter.com/unhcrghana) and news of their workshop is available on <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/social/unhcr-holds-workshop-on-statelessness-71637>

### Call for proposals: Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA)

OSIWA is calling for proposals to fund projects in the region relating to political governance, economic governance and human rights. If you are interested in raising funds for a project relating to statelessness, there are a number of ways in which you can do this for example by applying under the “enhancing citizenship rights and social cohesion” category or “promoting the rights of women, youth, vulnerable groups and differently-abled persons” category. Please feel free to consult their website for more information but beware that the deadline is the 30<sup>th</sup> May! <http://www.osiwa.org/en/portal/grants/79/Call-for-proposals.htm>