

STATELESSNESS IN WEST AFRICA

NEWSLETTER #8

January – March 2016

ABIDJAN DECLARATION – ONE YEAR ON

West Africa celebrates the first anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration on the eradication of statelessness. Countries in the region marked the day with special events and looked back at what has been achieved in the one year since the adoption of the Declaration on 25 February 2015.

A [high-level panel](#) to commemorate the 1st anniversary was organized in Dakar, **Senegal**. The event was well attended by Ministers and high-level Government representatives, UN representatives, embassies, civil society organizations, and media. The Government of Senegal took the opportunity to reiterate its commitment to end statelessness. The Senegalese music group *Bideew Bou Bess* performed the world's first statelessness song "I Belong", specifically written and composed for the first anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration. Renowned Senegalese musician Cheikh Lô, also performing during the event, promised to lend his voice to stateless persons during his upcoming world tour in 2016. Because "all it takes to end statelessness is political will", as Cheikh Lô put it.



High-level panel, Dakar, Senegal ©UNHCR/H. Caux

“To end statelessness is only a matter of political will”
Cheikh Lô during the high-level panel on the first anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration.

On the occasion of the first anniversary, **sign-up events for the #IBelong open letter** were organized in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.

- Participants of the high-level panel in Dakar, **Senegal**, including the music group *Bideew Bou Bess*, are among those who signed up to support the [#IBelong Campaign](#). A travelling art exhibition on the #IBelong Campaign can be visited in and around Dakar during the months of March and April, accompanied by dance performances, music, and screening of statelessness videos.
- In **Nigeria**, high-ranking personalities like the Minister of the Interior and the President of the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice signed the open letter.
- During a flash-mob event at Accra Mall, **Ghana**'s most popular shopping mall, 250 people from various backgrounds signed up, including famous Ghanaian actor John Dumelo.
- In **Sierra Leone**, #IBelong sign-up cards and T-shirts were distributed among Government officials, Parliamentarians, civil society, and at universities to mobilize supporters for the #IBelong Campaign.



Market women, Sierra Leone ©UNHCR/M. Kamara



University students, Sierra Leone ©USL/F.E. Bakley-Sesay



Accra Mall, Ghana ©FLASHMOB GHANA/B. Frimpong



Accra Mall, Ghana ©FLASHMOB GHANA/B. Frimpong

The events related to the celebrations of the 1st anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration enjoyed **wide media coverage** throughout the region – statelessness was the hot topic on national TV and radio stations, in print media, and on social networks:

- In **Burkina Faso**, UNHCR and the Government Focal Points engaged in a discussion on statelessness on national TV station *Radiotélévision du Burkina* (RTB), followed by the broadcasting of a video clip produced by the UNHCR office to sensitize people on the risks of statelessness in Burkina Faso.
- In **Ghana**, UNHCR and the Government Focal Points were interviewed jointly on *Metro TV*.
- In **Sierra Leone**, the Minister of Internal Affairs urged for accession to both Statelessness Conventions as well as for implementation of the Abidjan Declaration on national broadcast. Clips on statelessness were also screened in public locations throughout Freetown.
- In **Gambia**, the Minister of the Interior delivered a public statement on statelessness on national TV.
- In **Togo**, statelessness videos were equally broadcasted on national television.
- During the film festival *Afrikabok*, which took place from 25 Feb to 11 March in 11 remote villages along the **Senegal** River, statelessness videos were screened, reaching out to an audience of up to 30,000 people.
- For several days, statelessness videos were screened and posters displayed at the international airports of **Abidjan**, **Accra**, **Dakar**, and **Lomé**, attracting the attention of a large number of travelers.

Support the fight against statelessness, join the #IBelong Campaign: <http://ibelong.unhcr.org>



Radiotélévision, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso ©UNHCR



Airport Abidjan, Ivory Coast ©UNHCR/M. Toure

- **Sierra Leoneans** were able to call in and ask questions about statelessness during a one-day radio and phone-in program. Among the people 'on air' were representatives from the Constitutional Review Committee speaking about provisions in the draft constitution relating to statelessness, experts on civil status documentation from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Commissioner for Social Action, and UNHCR.
- Radio was also used as a platform to discuss and inform about statelessness in **Ivory Coast** and in **Guinea-Bissau**.



Monrovia, Liberia ©UNHCR/D.Diaz

Live radio discussions took place in **Liberia** between UNHCR, the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Abidjan Declaration and on progress made by Liberia on eradicating and preventing statelessness.

In addition to the broad engagement by the Government Focal Points on statelessness, many countries made efforts to engage with other officials to **mobilize support among Governments**.

- In **Ivory Coast**, the UNHCR Representative and the Minister of Justice published a joint op-ed reiterating the Government's commitment to ending statelessness, including by reforming its nationality laws. UNHCR in collaboration with the NGO *Organisation pour la Réduction de l'Apatrié* conducted a training for Civil Registry staff and community leaders in Ferkessédougou.
- In **Mali**, the UNHCR Representative met with the National Civil Registry Department. On this occasion, UNHCR confirmed its support for the modernization of the registration processes in Mali through technical and financial assistance.
- The Abidjan Declaration was distributed to parliamentarians in **Togo** and **Senegal**.
- In **Nigeria**, the UNHCR Representative met with the Minister of the Interior, who expressed his commitment to address statelessness in his country and to continue working with UNHCR.

- In **Guinea-Bissau**, the Ministry of Justice organised a reflection workshop with high-ranking officials including the Minister of Justice, Heads of Agencies of UNHCR and UNICEF, the President of the Human Rights Commission, as well as members of the civil society and media.
- In **Niger**, several community sensitization events in Tillabery, Tahoua, Ouallam, and Abala dealt with the importance of civil and birth registration. Furthermore, a conference on the Nigerien nationality law took place in Tillabery. The UNHCR Deputy Representative together with the Deputy Secretary-General of the Ministry of the Interior distributed birth certificates to mothers of newborn refugee children.



Training local authorities, community leaders, Ivory Coast @UNHCR



Conference participants, Niger @UNHCR/B.Siddo



Delivery of birth certificates, Niger @UNHCR/B.Siddo



Community sensitization, Niger ©BOUCHARA/B.Mahaman

REGIONAL MEETING ON STATELESSNESS

Government and UNHCR Focal Points on statelessness from the entire West Africa region met in Senegal for a three-day regional meeting on statelessness on 9-11 February. Participants were not new to the topic and engaged in specific discussions on the implementation of the commitments made in the Abidjan Declaration, the elaboration of national strategies, and the sharing of expertise and good practices in the eradication of statelessness. Concrete recommendations included to further sensitize Government authorities on the importance of putting the Abidjan commitments into action as well as to actively reach out and include civil society in the fight against statelessness.

ABIDJAN COMMITMENTS TRANSLATE INTO ACTION

1954 convention relative au statut des apatrides relating to the Status of Stateless Persons

1961 convention sur la réduction des cas d'apatridie on the Reduction of Statelessness

coordonateur national national coordinator

révision législative sur la nationalité nationality law reform

plan d'action action plan

■ Adhésion | Accession
■ Adhésion en cours | Accession underway

■ En place | In place
■ En cours | In progress

La déclaration d'Abidjan le 1^{er} anniversaire progrès
Abidjan Declaration the 1st anniversary progress
25.02.2016

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

CEDEAO ECOWAS

- 9 countries have **developed national action plans** on statelessness.¹
- 14 countries have officially **nominated Government Focal Points** for questions relating to statelessness in order to strengthen the coordination of governmental actions.²
- 7 States are currently **revising their legislation** to bring it in line with international standards on statelessness.³
- Around 22,000 people **acquired identity or nationality documentation**.

Developing national action plans – art. 24

- **Ghana** started the year 2016 with developing its national action plan on statelessness during a multi-stakeholder workshop in January. The groundwork was done in December 2015 when key stakeholders, including government representatives, UN agencies, civil society, and academia, met during an induction meeting to discuss the main causes and consequences of statelessness in Ghana. The recently drafted action plan sets out the main actions to pursue in the coming years in order to end statelessness in Ghana. The action plan has been shared with the Ministry of the Interior; approval by the Cabinet is pending.
- **Senegal** equally finalised its national action plan in January this year. Approval by the Ministry of Justice is pending.

Sensitization – art. 10

- In **Niger**, UNHCR engaged with local communities living in border areas through an interactive theatre project in order to sensitise them on the impact of statelessness. This interaction allowed people to ask questions on the causes and consequences of statelessness and on possible solutions to their situation. The importance of birth registration to prevent statelessness was one of the topics emphasized. **Guinea** announced that it is revising its nationality law, and a draft law should be submitted to Parliament soon.
- On March 9, UNHCR **Ivory Coast** launched the first NGO network engaged in the fight against statelessness, consisting of four partners that complement each other through their different roles and activities in the area of statelessness. The *Association des Femmes Juristes* will provide legal assistance to stateless people, while *Search for Common Ground* will focus its efforts on sensitizing communities on the impact of statelessness.

¹ Benin, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Senegal.

² All ECOWAS Member States apart from Cape Verde.

³ Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo.

Issuing nationality documentation – art. 7

- In **Benin**, people living in disputed border areas are particularly at risk of becoming stateless. In the remote parts of the country, where no registration system is in place, people face difficulties obtaining birth certificates and often have no means to regularise their status later in life due to the high costs involved. With UNHCR’s support, around 1.730 birth certificates have been distributed since December 2015 to inhabitants in disputed border areas, among them over one thousand children. These documents will help them to obtain nationality.
- **Ivory Coast** put in place a database containing all naturalisations since the country’s independence. This will give naturalised individuals easier access to proof of nationality.

Revising nationality laws – art. 2, 3

- 7 States are currently revising their legislation to bring it in line with international standards on statelessness, among them **Senegal**, which is working on the elaboration of a Children’s Act that will contain guarantees against statelessness at birth.⁴

Acceding to the Statelessness Conventions – art. 4, 14

- In **Burkina Faso**, UNHCR was invited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to join a work session to prepare arguments supporting the draft bill on accession to the 1961 Convention that will be submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval. The next step will be the approval by Parliament.
- In **Sierra Leone**, UNHCR in collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior, the Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Social Action organized a one-day workshop on statelessness for members of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights to lobby for accession to the Statelessness Conventions.

ECOWAS Community Court of Justice and UNHCR cooperate to end statelessness

On March 3, representatives of UNHCR **Nigeria** and the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice met in Abuja to discuss the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding signed by both institutions in July 2015. UNHCR used the opportunity to raise awareness on the Abidjan Declaration and the #IBelong Campaign. The President of the Community Court of Justice, the Honourable Justice Maria Do Ceu Silva Monteiro, said that, apart from the manifest injustice of statelessness, it was “morally untenable” for the world to continue to tolerate this situation when there is international consensus on the need to tackle this challenge and the solution is within reach.⁵



Abuja, Nigeria © UNHCR Nigeria

The President of the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice (middle) together with the Vice-President and two other Justices expressed their solidarity by publically signing the #IBelong open letter.

⁴ Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo.

⁵ http://www.courtecowas.org/site2012/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=297:ecowas-court-president-calls-for-global-movement-to-end-statelessness&catid=14:pressrelease&Itemid=36

STATELESSNESS FILMS RELEASED IN 2016

- “Enfants Apatrides” – testimony of stateless children in Senegal: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mT1zwiPlj0I>
- “For me to become a lawyer will be very difficult because I don't have a nationality” – testimony of a stateless woman in Liberia: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyPrhG3c61M>
- At risk of statelessness in Burkina Faso: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5G89CmmZyE&feature=youtu.be> (French); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJC5GnTLb8Y> (English)

UPCOMING

- 5-7 April – Dakar, Senegal: Strategic meeting with ECOWAS on the implementation of the Abidjan Declaration.
- 31 March – Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso: Launch of sensitization campaign on statelessness to be rolled out in all 13 regions of the country.



Dakar, Senegal @UNHCR/L.Haap

The travelling art exhibition on the #IBelong Campaign can still be visited in Dakar, Senegal, during the months of March and April.

STATELESSNESS IN THE NEWS

- UNHCR Press Release, First anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration on the eradication of statelessness: <http://www.unhcr.org/print/56ceda796.html>
- KORA, Senegalese artists join UNHCR in the fight against statelessness: <http://kora.unhcr.org/senegalese-artists-join-unhcr-fight-statelessness/>
- KORA, From stateless to having a nationality: the story of Mamadou: <http://kora.unhcr.org/stateless-nationality-story-mamadou/>
- KORA, Fighting statelessness in Benin: birth certificates are distributed in the disputed area of Kourou-Koualou: <http://kora.unhcr.org/birth-certificates-distributed-disputed-area-kourou-koualou/>
- RADIOVATICANA, Entretien, Afrique de l’Ouest, la régularisation progressive des apatrides: http://fr.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/02/26/afrique_de_louest_la_r%C3%A9gularisation_progressive_des_apatrides/1211382
- REUTERS, Thousands of West Africans gain identity documents, 1 million still stateless: U.N.: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-westafrica-stateless-idUSKCN0VY2A6>

- Agence de Presse Sénégalaise, « un enfant nait apatride dans le monde toutes les 10 minutes » : <http://www.aps.sn/actualites/societe/societe/article/150567>
- AFRIQUEREDACTION.COM, L’Afrique de l’Ouest célèbre le premier anniversaire de la Déclaration d’Abidjan sur l’élimination de l’apatridie <http://www.afriqueredaction.com/lafrique-de-louest-celebre-le-premier-anniversaire-de-la-declaration-dabidjan-sur-lelimination-de-lapatridie>
- RADIO DES NATIONS UNIES, quelques progrès visibles dans la lutte contre l’apatridie en Afrique de l’Ouest: <http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/french/2016/02/hcr-quelques-progres-visibles-dans-la-lutte-contre-lapatridie-en-afrique-de-louest/#.VvKAXWOVIM1>
- CENTRE D’ACTUALITES DE L’ONU, L’Afrique de l’Ouest célèbre le premier anniversaire de la Déclaration d’Abidjan sur l’élimination de l’apatridie: <http://www.un.org/apps/newsFr/storyF.asp?NewsID=36705&Cr=apatridie&Cr1=#.VvKAh2OVIM1>



www.unhcr.org/statelessness
unhcr.org/ecowas2015/
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sendawas@unhcr.org