

## Statelessness Unit Dakar Update: May-June 2014, UNHCR Regional Representation for West Africa

### Regional Meeting for NGOs and National Human Rights Institutions, Saly, Senegal



From the 29<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, the Statelessness Unit in Dakar brought together regional Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to discuss common approaches on activities aimed at ending statelessness in the region. Held in the coastal town of Saly, the event sought to build on the expertise that the organisations had accumulated since their attendance at a statelessness training event in Senegal in October 2013. It was clear from the energy and enthusiasm of the participants that there was growing commitment and momentum to working on statelessness at a grass-roots and governmental level. Participants came equipped with updates on their respective countries and ideas on how to improve their governments' responses to statelessness. In fact, participants from Benin even

had updates from their first statelessness working group meeting!

One of the key aims of the meeting was to gather participants so as to give them the opportunity to develop a common statement on statelessness. The afternoon brainstorming session resulted in the finalisation of two communiques, by NHRIs and CSOs respectively, on the measures they wish their governments to take in order to see an end to statelessness. The communiques, currently under embargo, will be presented at West Africa's first ever Ministerial Conference on Statelessness in Cote D'Ivoire later on this year

### Mission of expert Bronwen Manby for study on Migration and Statelessness in West Africa

On May 4, 2014, Bronwen Manby, renowned expert on migration and statelessness and UNHCR/ IOM Consultant, embarked on a sub-regional study on the dynamics of migration and statelessness in West Africa. This 4-month study has already enabled Ms Manby to visit several capitals and rural areas across the West Africa region, including Senegal, Niger and the Republic of Guinea. She has been analyzing not only theoretical but also practical issues related to the right to nationality, the production and issuance of official documentation, birth registration procedures amongst others. During the course of her visits, Ms Manby has been able to meet with refugees and stranded migrants in all of these countries in order better to better understand and account for their situation. During the next steps of this study, Ms Manby will travel to Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Ghana and ultimately produce a report to be presented at the UNHCR Ministerial Conference on Statelessness in West Africa later on this year.



### Identification mission to the Ile aux Oiseaux in Benin

On May 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> 2014, UNHCR country representation in Benin, with the support of UNHCR Regional Representation for West Africa, conducted a mission to the Ile aux Oiseaux located on Benin's northern border with Niger. The island on the Niger River was handed to Benin in 2005 after an International Court of Justice ruling that saw most of the contested islands handed over to Niger. Since territorial transfers often result in situations of statelessness, UNHCR fielded a mission to the island in order to assess the legal status of the islanders. During the mission, UNHCR

staff collected testimonies from several people who shared their views on the hardship they were going through due to a lack of documentation. The fishing community and the nomadic community living on the island both spoke of their lack of knowledge of where to register their children's births and how to access services given their lack of documentation from either Benin or Niger. They also expressed their frustration of not being able to move freely and not having any identity documents. Fortunately the team was able to hold meetings with the Mayor of Karimama, the nearest town to the Ile aux Oiseaux, and to give local authorities a sense of what problems the islanders were facing. The Mayor was deeply sympathetic towards the plight of the islanders and has pledged to work with UNHCR and the Government of Benin so as to lay out durable solutions for affected communities.



*Picture of fishing community from Ile aux Oiseaux/ UNHCR*

### **Workshop on statelessness in Togo**

UNHCR Togo's Representative Mbili Ambaoumba, with the assistance of Senior Regional Protection Officer Emmanuelle Mitte, hosted a workshop in Lome to address issues relevant to statelessness in Togo. Approximately 20 individuals participated in the two day workshop. The dynamic group was comprised of both government and United Nations representatives with Mr. Koffi Gagni, the Minister of Social Action, kindly providing opening remarks. The workshop provided a valuable opportunity for decision-makers to identify the causes and consequences of statelessness in Togo as well as to begin planning for solutions. Participating journalists came away from the workshop with a better understanding of statelessness and a renewed commitment to bring attention to the important issue of nationality. Their reports on the event can be found on the following links: <http://bit.ly/1nNNBL9>; <http://bit.ly/1nNNI9y>; <http://bit.ly/1pG9D5u>; <http://bit.ly/SRlyz5>; <http://bit.ly/1i8Lz6>; <http://bit.ly/1smm9sW>;

### **Barbara Hendriks visit to Cote D'Ivoire**



UNHCR Cote D'Ivoire is thrilled to be hosting Goodwill Ambassador Barbara Hendriks from 23-26 of June. Barbara Hendriks is the longest-serving UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador. The highly respected classical singer has worked tirelessly on behalf of refugees and stateless persons for the past 25 years. Statelessness is expected to be a focus of Ms. Hendriks' time in the country. Plans are underway to have the team meet with Ivorian returnees who find themselves without a nationality and other stateless persons in Cote D'Ivoire. We look forward to sharing the results of this campaign with our readers in next month's edition of the newsletter! In the meantime, you can learn more about Barbara Hendriks and her valuable relationship with UNHCR by following the link: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c50.html>

#### **Press Coverage on statelessness in the region picks up!**

As always, we like to end the newsletter on a positive note. This time, we would like to send a sincere thank you to all our partners who are working so hard to get statelessness in the news. Particularly Kikelomo Ifekoya for her piece in Radio Nigeria on Statelessness and Human Trafficking, Victor Asige for his interview with the Consul-General of the Ghana High Commission in Nigeria, who argued that statelessness had consequences in the resurgence of terrorism in Nigeria (<http://bit.ly/1BTdrP>), Steven Ozias Kiemtoré for his continued follow up on statelessness in the Burkina Faso's Sidwaya newspaper, Raju Parwani in Ghana for the excellent article on low birth registration rates in rural Ghana (<http://bit.ly/1lwISpC>), William Selmah for his thought provoking article on Liberians debating the 'discriminatory' constitution (<http://bit.ly/SKZoiw>) Mr Goore Tra Bi's article to be published very soon on stateless people in the Ivorian city of Bouafle and Elias Behanzin's in-depth report on the Ile aux Oiseaux in Benin published on our blog (<http://bit.ly/1BK0v4>) We also send our encouragement to the team of Togolese journalists and humanitarians who are currently collaborating on the ambitious Stateless Vision Project (<https://www.facebook.com/people/Stateless-Visions/100005981327738>)