

Statement of Support by Civil Society for Eliminating Statelessness in the Great Lakes Region

Ministerial Conference on the Eradication of Statelessness in the Great Lakes Region, 16-18 April 2019

Your Excellences, Honourable Ministers and Principle Secretaries, Ambassadors and Plenipotentiaries,
Head of Division for Humanitarian Affairs of the African Union Commission
Director of the Africa Bureau of the UNHCR
Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa
Executive Secretary of the ICGLR
Chief Administrative Secretary of the Kenyan Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government
Representatives of UNHCR, ICGLR and AU and other intergovernmental organisations
Stateless and formerly stateless communities and people represented here
Representatives of civil society
Ladies and gentlemen

My name is Achieng Akena and I am the Executive Director of the International Refugee Rights Initiative. I have been mandated to give the statement of support by civil society.

Your excellences, ladies and gentlemen,
The same Pan Africanist spirit that drew our fore bearers to the imperative of continental unity, solidarity and cohesion, is the same African spirit that continues its call upon us today, to continue to remove Africans from subjugation and strife. To ensure that every person in Africa is able to live a life of purpose and dignity, and is able to attain socio-economic development.

The heroic struggles for human dignity did not end in the 1900s, but continue to manifest themselves in different ways, and it is mandated upon our generations to continue to fight the scourges of poverty and exclusion.

This is why we civil societies from the 12 member states of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), applaud your continued efforts to address statelessness in the region and to give everyone an identity.

We take note that since Member States signed the Dar-es-Salaam Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in 2004 and the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region in 2006 (modified in 2012), under the auspices of the United Nations and the African Union, ICGLR states have consistently made progress towards addressing peace and security by enhancing their registration and identification systems.

Honourable Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,
The signing of the Brazzaville Declaration on the Eradication of Statelessness in June 2017 and the Supporting Plan of Action to accelerate progress, is a key indication of the commitment we have made to address the suffering of our people as expressed by Thomas Nguli who spoke before me.

Over the past few days we have been keenly listening to states make progress reports on the steps they have taken to enhance birth and civil registration, and to address existing situations of statelessness; including the carrying out of qualitative and quantitative studies, creating a greater understanding of the challenges and lived realities of stateless persons and those at risk of becoming so.

Over the past couple of days, we have been most appreciative of the statements by governments committed to restore human dignity through the guarantee of legal identity and nationality.

We agree with you that statelessness is a human issue, when we see the real-life consequences for communities, families and individuals that are affected by legal and administrative gaps that render them stateless. We agree that statelessness is a development issue, because we must grow sustainably with

everyone on board, no one can be left behind. We agree that it is a peace and security issue, because states are more secure when they know all of their populations and can identify and provide for them; and that long-term peace and development is best attained through inclusion.

In closing, your excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

We continue urge states to take all measures to ensure that children have a nationality from birth through enhanced access to universal birth registration. For the populations that have missed out on the opportunity, we call on the states to take special measures to facilitate access to late birth registration as a foundational pillar of addressing statelessness.

We commend the efforts to remove gender discrimination in nationality laws, and continue to urge states to create laws and standards that ensure that all persons have documents that are conclusive proof of nationality, for all people in the region.

We applaud the ongoing effort by the African Union to set normative standards and solutions for nationality and the eradication of statelessness through the development of a continental protocol.

We civil society organisations in the region, pledge to support our governments through complementary efforts to meet their commitments, and ensure continued linkages between stateless populations and states, for enhanced accountability.