

STATELESSNESS IN WEST AFRICA

NEWSLETTER #11

October – December 2016

TWO YEARS OF PROGRESS IN THE REGION



In 2014, the [Global Campaign #IBelong](#) was launched with the aim of wiping out statelessness by 2024. Since then, members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have strongly committed to end this plight in the region. The advocacy efforts from the campaign are strengthened by regional commitments, such as the [Abidjan Declaration on the Eradication of Statelessness](#), adopted in February 2015 by all ECOWAS member States.

Eleven out of fifteen West Africa countries have now acceded to both the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions, including most recently **Guinea Bissau** in September, and **Sierra Leone** and **Mali** in May. Following the vote by its parliament last November to accede to the 1961 convention, **Burkina Faso** will soon become the 12th State to be party to both conventions.

Since the adoption of the Abidjan Declaration, nearly all countries in the region have developed **Plans of Action** to end statelessness. Ten countries are in the process of **revising their nationality laws** while others have started issuing identity or nationality papers to undocumented people on their territories.

So far, **45,000** persons who are stateless or at risk of statelessness have received identity documents in West Africa since the Abidjan Declaration, including 34,000 birth certificates issued mainly in **Benin**, **Côte d'Ivoire** and **Mali**, and 10,550 nationality certificates issued in **Côte d'Ivoire**.

CELEBRATING THE 2ND ANNIVERSARY - #IBELONG CAMPAIGN



[Video-clip](#) from Bideew Bou Bess single 'I Belong' ©Gelongal

In November, **Senegalese** band and #IBelong Campaign supporter [Bideew Bou Bess](#) released a new single called '[I Belong](#)' on the occasion of the Campaign Anniversary. Their clip depicts the devastating consequences of statelessness and reminds listeners that they can act to change laws and make sure all stateless people have the right to say 'I belong'.

Voices against Statelessness

Musical performances sent strong messages against statelessness in **Senegal**. On December 30, Bideew Bou Bess celebrated their 20th anniversary with a big show where they played their new single and videos on statelessness were projected on giant screens. UNHCR's high level supporter, [Cheikh Lo](#), performed at a music festival in the seaside resort area of Saly on 16 December. "Everyone has the right to a nationality," shouted the musician. At the Guédiawaye By Rap festival in Dakar on Christmas Day, awareness raising activities were performed during the entire day on statelessness, and various rap artists such as Xuman and Keur Gui reminded the public of the importance of having proper documentation.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the first ever national poetry slam championship was organized in November and December on the theme of statelessness. 24 competitors fought it out over 3 rounds, following a training conducted by UNHCR on statelessness. The debate about statelessness was taken to new levels, with creative, thoughtful and edgy performances all round. Placide Konan won the final, and on this basis he will participate in the world cup of slam that will take place in France in 2017.

In **Ghana**, the campaign was supported by actress Ama K. Abebrese, who recorded a very inspiring message underlining the injustice of statelessness, available [here](#).



Cheikh Lo during Festival Vieilles pirogues. Senegal ©Vieilles Pirogues



Slammer during competition. Côte d'Ivoire ©AuNomdu Slam



Bideew Bou Bess 20th Anniversary concert, Senegal©UNHCR



Rappers during Gediawaye by rap festival, Senegal ©G.hip-hop

Inspiration through Films



Children watch videos during Afrikabok festival - Senegal ©Borgarello

For two weeks in November, the Afrikabok travelling cinema festival crossed 10 regions of **Senegal** to entertain and raise awareness on statelessness. In addition to screening videos on the theme, the organization distributed informative comic books. Learn more Festival Afrikabok [here](#).

“Because we cannot live without rights and because we want to exist, we have the right to a nationality”. This phrase captures the spirit of the video ‘Invisibility’ produced by UNHCR to celebrate the 2nd anniversary of #IBelong campaign. The video was shown on Senegalese TV and giant screens in Senegal and Togo. Watch the video [here](#) and join the celebration!



Actress during video-recording of ‘Invisibility’ ©UNHCR/F.Bissacot

Youth engage against statelessness

For three weeks in November, an entertaining awareness-raising project on statelessness engaged with some 8,000 students aged 7 to 16 years across seven different schools in the suburbs of Dakar, **Senegal**. Activities included drawing contests, singing songs, watching videos and debating on statelessness. The project also sensitized some 300 school teachers and local leaders.

In **Liberia**, UNHCR collaborated with the government, Church Aid and several local groups to organize a parade and awareness raising sessions with students, youth and women groups. Participation at radio stations and recreational activities for students complemented the celebration.

In **Ghana**, a two-day sensitisation campaign was conducted at the University of Ghana and Ashesi University where UNHCR assisted in organizing a sign-up event for the #IBelong campaign. Over 500 petitions - both hardcopies and online- were signed over the two days. A video on the event is available [here](#).



A student is invited to sign the #IBelong campaign at University of Ghana ©UNHCR/E.Obousiba



Parade on statelessness, Monrovia, Liberia ©Church Aid Inc.



Students answer questions on statelessness after debating the issue. Dakar, Senegal ©UNHCR/F.Bissacot



Students singing songs on statelessness. Dakar, Senegal ©UNHCR/F.Bissacot

Media and Sensitization efforts

In **Benin**, UNHCR organized a celebration event with the United Nations Coordinator and Deputy Director of the Ministry of Justice. A sensitization exercise targeting the general public was also organized in the streets, and informative flyers were distributed during the day. Representatives of government, academia, civil society and UNHCR also participated in a TV show at ORTB channel to discuss statelessness. A part of the interview can be watched [here](#).

In **Senegal**, UNHCR's Regional Representation for West Africa organized a [press conference](#) with the participation of #IBelong campaign supporters *Bideew Bou Bess*. The Senegalese band used the opportunity to launch their video-clip '[I Belong](#)' that deals with the challenges of statelessness. UNHCR assessed the developments and challenges in West Africa. A visual campaign was also carried out throughout Senegal, whereby messages against statelessness were shown on national TV, giant LED screens, and in the airport.

In **Mali**, a massive dissemination of SMSs with awareness raising information reached more than 5 million people. The biggest Malian television channel shot street interviews and a debate with UNHCR ([see here](#) - min. 35) during its highest audience news show. A round table on statelessness was also organized on UN Radio with UNHCR and journalists.

In **Guinea**, UNHCR and Government organized a press conference with the Ministry of State and the Ministry of Justice, who reinforced the commitment of the government to adopt the National Action Plan to End statelessness.

In **Togo**, UNHCR took part in a TV debate with the Director of Nationality and an academic. A short video on statelessness was also broadcast several times on national television and information posters displayed in different parts of Lomé.



Poster with information on the campaign in Lomé, Togo ©UNHCR



Sensitization of the general public in Benin ©BG COM



Government representatives and UNHCR at a Press Conference in Guinea ©UNHCR



News covering the celebration in Mali ©ORTM-Mali

ABIDJAN COMMITMENTS TRANSLATED INTO ACTION

Developing national action plans – art. 24

- In **Cote d'Ivoire**, the National Action Plan on Statelessness was formally presented to representatives of the Ministers of Justice; Foreign Affairs; and Human Rights and Public Liberties in December. These Ministers committed to ensure adoption of the Plan by the Cabinet in early 2017.
- In **Nigeria**, the Ministry of Interior with the support of UNHCR organized a three day multi-stakeholder workshop to develop the National Action Plan to End Statelessness from 8-10 November 2016. The next step is to have it formally adopted by the Ministry of Interior.
- In **Togo**, from 18 to 20 November, UNHCR organized a workshop on the strategy to prevent and combat statelessness. Participants- who included representatives of Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, academia and civil society- produced a draft National Action Plan during the workshop.
- In **Guinea**, the Ministry of Justice presented a Bill to the Inter-ministerial Council that aims for the creation of a National Programme for the eradication of statelessness.



Participants at the statelessness workshop in Abuja, Nigeria
©UNHCR/Garriba



Workshop on statelessness in Lomé, Togo ©UNHCR

Improve information and data collection – art. 1, 15

- Studies mapping the landscape of statelessness are ongoing in **Benin, Gambia, Ghana, Mali and Nigeria**.
- UNHCR **Côte d'Ivoire** published in December a seminal [study on nationality and statelessness](#). The report examines all the historical and legal factors leading to statelessness in the country, charts the evolution of nationality and civil status laws, and identifies the main groups at risk of statelessness.
- In November 2016, UNHCR **Côte d'Ivoire** and the Ivorian National Statistics Institute began studying the data related to statelessness available in the 2014 census. A government task force was trained on statelessness ahead of the study. Whilst the census cannot give concrete figures on statelessness, some proxy factors are being examined in detail, related to nationality, birth documentation and other variables. The findings will be available in early 2017.

Strengthening Regional Commitment



Professors during workshop in Accra, Ghana ©G.Geoff

Regional – West Africa. UNHCR in collaboration with the University of Ghana organized a training for Law Professors and Lecturers to assist in developing expertise on the issue of statelessness and right to a nationality and to encourage research in these fields. The 5-day training was designed to provide a bigger picture on statelessness issues in Africa and to push participants to consider how their work can help address these questions. A total of 30 participants from 13 different African countries took part in the activity. They adopted a [communiqué](#) whereby they commit to teach, conduct research and carry out advocacy/sensitization activities in the field of statelessness.

In October, UNHCR and the **ECOWAS Parliament** jointly organized a workshop in Abuja, Nigeria on the role of Parliamentarians in addressing the challenges associated with Statelessness in West Africa. As a result of the workshop, the ECOWAS Parliament and UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding whereby they commit to conduct joint mission to sensitise member States on the importance of accession and implementation of the statelessness conventions



Representatives of ECOWAS and UNHCR discuss the 2016/2017 joint action plan at ECOWAS Parliament in Abuja - Nigeria © UNHCR/Aseh

Reducing statelessness – art. 18

- In **Mali**, UNHCR's partner STOP SAHEL – Kayes launched a call for proposals for the recruitment of legal advisors to facilitate access to Malian nationality for 150 refugee families (800 people) originating from Mali. They face critical challenges to exercise their right to a nationality.
- The Ministry of Justice of **Burkina Faso** estimates that more than 3.5 million Burkinabes live in **Côte d'Ivoire**, the majority without documentation. These people are at risk of statelessness. Both governments, with the support of UNHCR, started a mission throughout Côte d'Ivoire to issue birth registration and nationality certificates to those Burkinabe entitled to it with a view to prevent statelessness.
- Since July 2016 the government of **Senegal** has been strengthening its policy of removing child beggars from the streets. These children, commonly referred to as Talibes, are often given to Heads of Koranic schools (Daara) and are forced to beg daily. In the cases of foreign children, a number of them return to their country of origin, be it through government assistance or by their own means. In **Guinea Bissau**, 124 children were returned by the Senegalese authorities in 2016. The majority of children and their family members do not possess any type of documentation and are at risk of statelessness. UNHCR met with some of these children and is following-up with civil society organizations responsible for documentation in the region.

Acceding to the Statelessness Conventions – art. 4, 14



Vote at Parliament in Burkina Faso ©UNHCR/P. Absalon

On 18 October 2016, the members of the Parliament of **Burkina Faso** adopted a bill on the accession to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, marking a major step forward in the fight against statelessness. At international level and officially, Burkina Faso will be party to the 1961 convention after depositing the instruments of accession to the Secretary-General via the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations in New York. Meanwhile, much remains to be done on the ground with regard to the identification and reduction of the risk of statelessness among affected communities.

UPCOMING

- In January, UNHCR in partnership with *Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie* will organize in Dakar, **Senegal**, a week-long training for practitioners from civil society organizations, UNHCR and governments on nationality and statelessness. Participants from all French speaking countries in Africa are invited to the workshop which aims to stimulate develop their expertise, share best practices, and equip them with tools to address statelessness.
- In February, West African countries will celebrate the second anniversary of the **Abidjan Declaration** on the eradication of statelessness. Different activities will take place across the region to sensitize the general public and to reinforce government commitments to end statelessness.
- In February, university students from **Cote d'Ivoire**, **Senegal** and **Guinea** will debate issues of statelessness at the final of *Voix de Jeunes* competition in Abidjan, **Côte d'Ivoire**. The event will be broadcast on national TV channels across the region and a week-long bootcamp will take place before the final to prepare participants. The activity is organized by the NGO Social Change Factory in partnership with UNHCR and intends to increase media attention and academic interest on the issue of statelessness.



A young man gives his testimony on documentation, Guinea Bissau ©UNHCR

In January 2017, UNHCR will launch **#1minute1million** social media campaign to raise awareness on statelessness across West Africa. People from different countries in region will be sharing their experiences and challenges related to documentation.

Stay tuned at [UNHCR West Africa Statelessness](#) to follow and support this initiative!

STATELESSNESS IN THE NEWS

- ORTB covers the 2nd anniversary of the #IBelong campaign in Mali ([Mali - French - minute 35](#))
- Senegalese rappers use music to raise awareness on statelessness ([Senegal – English](#))
- UNHCR in Benin celebrates the 2nd anniversary of the global campaign against statelessness ([Benin – French](#))
- Bakassi people on verge of becoming stateless, UNHCR warns ([Nigeria – English](#))
- The UNHCR and ECOWAS recently signed a MoU to improve the protection environment for stateless persons. ([Regional - English](#))
- The travelling film festival Afrikabok returns for its 2016 edition ([Senegal – French](#))
- Rights of refugees and stateless people: A seminar open to Police School by SAARA ([Côte d’Ivoire – French](#))
- Bill for the creation of a National Programme to end statelessness ([Guinea – French](#))
- Moving cinema in Fatick to raise awareness on statelessness ([Senegal - French](#))
- 2nd Anniversary of the campaign against statelessness in West Africa ([Regional - French](#))
- Ivorian civil status and statelessness: An open training seminar in Abidjan ([Côte d’Ivoire - French](#))

LOOKING FOR MORE?

If you want more information, we have the following options for you:

- UNHCR’s Global [website](#) on Statelessness;
- UNHCR’s #IBelong Global Campaign to End Statelessness – [Support it here](#);
- Documents from the [Ministerial Conference](#) on Statelessness in the ECOWAS region in 2015;
- [Webpage](#) where we post our Newsletter in 3 different languages;
- [KORA](#) - UNHCR’s blog dedicated to Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons, and Stateless people in West and Central Africa;
- Look for us on Social Media, we are on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) (@StatelessWA) and [Youtube](#) ;
- You can also reach us by e-mail at sendawas@unhcr.org.

CORRIGENDUM

In our previous Newsletter, please take note of the inclusion of the word ‘not’ in **bold** below.

“The regional conference on the voluntary repatriation of Ivorian refugees, held in Côte d’Ivoire in July, tackled the issue of documentation problems among returnees by facilitating late birth registration procedures, with a view to preventing this population from further exposure to the risk of statelessness. Findings indicated that 36 per cent of the returnee population had **not** registered their births, and that 37 per cent had lost their identification documents”.



www.unhcr.org/statelessness
unhcr.org/ecowas2015/
Issuu.com/unhcrinwestafrica



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