**UNHCR launches 10-year global campaign to end statelessness**

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GENEVA, November 4 (UNHCR) –The UN refugee agency, with endorsement from high-profile supporters, on Tuesday launched a global campaign aimed at ending the devastating legal limbo of statelessness, which affects millions of people around the world.

"The goal of eradicating statelessness is looking increasingly possible thanks to dramatic recent progress in the number of states acceding to two key UN human rights treaties," said a UNHCR press release announcing the "I Belong" campaign.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie and more than 30 celebrities and world opinion leaders today published an Open Letter, saying that 60 years after the United Nations first agreed to protect stateless people, "now it's time to end statelessness itself."

At least 10 million people worldwide are currently stateless and a baby is born stateless every 10 minutes. Not allowed a nationality, they are often denied the rights and services that countries normally offer their citizens.

"Statelessness can mean a life without education, without medical care or legal employment . . . a life without the ability to move freely, without prospects or hope," the Open Letter said. "Statelessness is inhuman. We believe it is time to end this injustice."

Acclaimed actress and director Jolie said being stateless meant adults and their children having no legal identity, no passport, no vote, and few or no opportunities to get an education. "Ending statelessness would right these terrible wrongs. But it would also strengthen society in countries where stateless people are found, by making it possible to draw on their energy and talents. It is both an obligation and an opportunity for governments everywhere to put an end to this exclusion," she said.

Most situations of statelessness are a direct consequence of discrimination based on ethnicity, religion or gender. Twenty-seven countries at present deny women the right to pass their nationality on to their children on an equal basis with men, a situation that can create chains of statelessness that span generations. There is also a very real link between statelessness, displacement and regional stability.

UNHCR's campaign is being launched amid signs of a shift in international attitudes surrounding statelessness. Three years ago, there were barely 100 states parties to the two statelessness treaties –the 1954 UN Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Today the number of accessions stands at 144, bringing critical mass within reach.

Despite such progress, new risks of statelessness have emerged with the growing number of major conflicts. Wars in Central African Republic and Syria, for example, have forced millions of people into internal displacement or into becoming refugees.

Tens of thousands of refugee children have been born in exile and UNHCR is working with the governments and partners in the countries receiving refugees on prioritizing birth registration for these children. The fact that many lack documents or that in some situations fathers have gone missing because of the conflict means that many of these children may face difficulties in proving they are citizens.

UNHCR has partnered with the United Colors of Benetton to create the "I Belong" campaign, which aims to draw global attention to the devastating life-long consequences of statelessness. Benetton has developed the creative content of the campaign and the campaign website to host it. Following the campaign launch, the Open Letter will become an online petition on this microsite, aiming to collect 10 million signatures in support of ending statelessness within a decade.

The refugee agency also released on Tuesday a "Special Report on Statelessness," which highlights the human impact of the phenomenon, and a 10-point Global Action Plan to End Statelessness. This aims both to resolve major existing crises and to ensure no child is born stateless in the future.

"Statelessness makes people feel like their very existence is a crime," said Guterres. "We have a historic opportunity to end the scourge of statelessness within 10 years, and give back hope to millions of people. We cannot afford to fail this challenge."

While issues of statelessness remain politically contentious in some countries, in others ending it can be as simple as changing a few words in a country's citizenship law. Over the past decade, legislative and policy changes have allowed more than 4 million stateless people to acquire a nationality or have their nationality confirmed.

For example, a 2008 High Court ruling in Bangladesh allowed 300,000 stateless Urdu speakers to become citizens, ending generations of despair. In Côte d'Ivoire, where statelessness was a root cause of a decade of armed conflict, legal reforms in 2013 allow long-term residents in the country to acquire a nationality. In Kyrgyzstan, more than 65,000 former Soviet citizens have acquired or confirmed their Kyrgyz citizenship since 2009.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the 1954 UN Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, which, alongside the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, provides the international legal basis for ending statelessness.

"With enough political will, UNHCR believes statelessness can be resolved. And unlike so many other problems facing governments today, statelessness can be solved in our lifetime," Tuesday's press release said. There are currently 83 state parties to the 1954 Convention and 61 to the 1961 Convention.

[http://ibelong.unhcr.org](http://ibelong.unhcr.org/#_ga=1.166910270.1493668553.1415257244)

**Task:**

**Go to the link above and click on “Stories.” Scroll down the page and watch two of the three videos entitled, “Stories of Statelessness.” Take detailed notes and be prepared to discuss the content and how it relates to other ideas.**