

UN refugee chief hails Ecuador, Honduras and Portugal for action on statelessness convention



Ambassadors Jose Filipe Moraes Cabral (Portugal) and Mary Elizabeth Flores (Honduras) at accession event in New York. Gabriele Goettsche-Wanli of the UN Office of Legal Affairs looks on. Photo: UNHCR/H. VanBrabandt

2 October 2012 – The United Nations refugee chief today praised Ecuador, Honduras and Portugal for their “concrete steps” to address statelessness through becoming parties to conventions that deal with the issue, while also calling on other countries to follow suit.

“The action by these three States demonstrates a growing awareness about statelessness and, more importantly, the political will to address it,” the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, said in a [news release](#), noting that statelessness affects up to 12 million people worldwide.

At a special event on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly’s high-level debate last week, Ecuador became a party to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, Honduras to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and Portugal became party to both conventions.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), most of the millions of stateless people around the globe have no secure residence in the countries where they reside, are denied the legal right to work and have limited access to education and health care.

UNHCR launched a campaign to end statelessness in 2011. Since then, the refugee agency has recorded 22 accessions by 15 countries to either one or both of the 1954 and 1961 Conventions.

The 1954 Convention establishes basic rights for stateless persons, while the 1961 Convention sets out safeguards to prevent statelessness from occurring and reduce the stateless population over time.

“We are at a turning point. Fifteen states have become parties to the Conventions in the past 18 months and we know that many more are preparing to do so – in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East,” Mr. Guterres added. “This is unprecedented.”

The High Commissioner was referring to a landmark ministerial conference in Geneva last year, during which more than 60 governments pledged to take action to prevent and reduce statelessness and to protect the rights of stateless people.

At the event, 12 countries also committed to reform nationality laws, including those which discriminate against women by preventing them from conferring nationality upon their children. More than 30 governments committed to becoming parties to one or both of the two conventions.

The refugee chief also called upon states to bring an end to statelessness – and the “denial of human rights that this represents” – within the next decade, stressing that statelessness “is an anachronism in the 21st century.”

He added that UNHCR was ready to assist governments in finding solutions and emphasized that accession to the statelessness conventions is only one step.

With the latest accessions, 76 countries are state parties to the 1954 Convention, up from 65 at beginning of 2011; while the 1961 Convention now has 48 parties, up from 37 at beginning of 2011.

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