



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

The Human Rights of Stateless People

Monday, March 23, 2015

1:30 PM – 3:30 PM

2172 Rayburn House Office Building

Opening Remarks

Good afternoon, and welcome to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's hearing on The Human Rights of Stateless People. I would like to begin by welcoming our witnesses – thank you for your hard work in shining a spotlight on the issue of statelessness and protecting stateless populations. I would also like to thank the staff of the Commission for organizing this important hearing.

We are here today to discuss statelessness, a human rights problem that is relatively unknown, but has a devastating impact on people's lives in dozens of countries around the world. Today, over 10 million people are stateless, which means that they are living without any nationality or citizenship. They are neither refugees nor migrants, but people who are not recognized by any State as a national under the operation of its law.

Stateless people suffer because nationality is “the right to have rights”: it's a precondition for enjoying the full range of basic human rights. Many stateless people are unable to access basic services, go to school, work legally, register births, marriages, or deaths, travel freely, own property, or vote. For these reasons, they are also especially vulnerable to arbitrary treatment, exploitation, and labor and sex trafficking. Ending statelessness could help reduce many other human rights violations.

The first step in solving the problem of statelessness is recognizing and understanding it. This is the first goal of today's hearing. There are many reasons why statelessness occurs. Some cases originate from racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination in nationality laws, such as the Rohingya in Burma, Dominicans of Haitian descent, the “Bidoon” from Kuwait, and the Hill Tribe people from Thailand. Gender discrimination in birth registration is an issue in over 25 countries, including Syria. As a result, many Syrian children who have lost their fathers in the ongoing armed conflict are at risk of being stateless. I am also alarmed that recently some Gulf States, including Kuwait and Bahrain, have punished political dissidents by taking away their

citizenship. I look forward to learning from our expert witnesses about these varying causes of statelessness and their consequences.

Our second goal today is to discuss the actions that can and should be taken to end statelessness. I look forward to hearing about what the United States and the international community have done to protect stateless people and eradicate statelessness, and what more we should do to help. I strongly believe that solutions to this human rights problem are within a closer reach than some of the others we examine in the Commission.