



# ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN NATIONALITY LAWS

High Level Side Event at the 62<sup>nd</sup> Commission on the Status of Women

6:30-7:45 PM, Wednesday, 14 March the 2018

Express Bar, United Nations General Assembly Building

405 East 42nd Street, New York, NY, 10017, USA



Over 50 countries maintain nationality laws that discriminate on the basis of gender, denying women the right to confer nationality on their children and spouses on an equal basis with men. These sex discriminatory laws result in wide-ranging [human rights violations](#). However, momentum to reform nationality laws is increasing around the world.

On March 14, 2018, the **Permanent Missions of Australia, Madagascar, Morocco, and Sierra Leone, the Office of the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UN Women, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights** will hold a High Level Side Event to share lessons learned from recent nationality law reforms processes and the benefits of gender-equal nationality laws.

## Panelists:

- **Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director (invited)**
- **The Honorable Ms. Isata Kabia, Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs of the Republic of Sierra Leone**
- **The Honorable Ms. Bassima Hakkaoui, Minister of Family, Solidarity, Equality and Social Development of the Kingdom of Morocco**
- **Ambassador Inas Mekkawy, Director of the Women, Family and Childhood Department at the League of Arab States**
- **Ms. Habiba Ali Rashid Al Hinai, an affected person**
- **Ms. Catherine Harrington, Campaign Manager, Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights**

**\*RSVPs required for those without a UN badge. [Click here to RSVP](#).\***

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\*Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights Steering Committee Members include: Equality Now, Equal Rights Trust, Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, UNHCR, Women’s Learning Partnership, and Women’s Refugee Commission



## High Level Event

### Achieving Gender Equality in Nationality Laws

Wednesday, March 14, 6:30 P.M. – 7:45 P.M., United Nations Headquarters, Express Bar

#### *Introduction*

To share lessons learned from recent reform processes and the [benefits of gender-equal nationality laws](#), the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights in partnership with the Permanent Missions of Australia, Madagascar, Morocco and Sierra Leone, the Office of the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, UN Women, the UN Refugee Agency, the United Nations Children’s Fund, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union will hold the High Level Event, “Achieving Gender Equality in Nationality Laws” at the 62<sup>nd</sup> Commission on the Status of Women. The High Level Event will emphasize the importance of such reforms to the achievement of gender equality, the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the eradication of statelessness. The event will also highlight recent positive developments and important opportunities to advance gender-equal nationality rights.

#### *Background*

Despite significant reforms to end legal discrimination against women, today over 50 countries maintain nationality laws that discriminate on the basis of gender.<sup>1</sup> 25 countries deny women the right to confer nationality on their children on an equal basis with men.

Citizenship laws form the foundation of individuals’ relationship with the state and determine access to a range of fundamental human rights. At their core, nationality laws that discriminate on the basis of gender contradict the principle of the equality of all citizens, and reflect the state’s position that the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are based not on one’s status as a citizen, but according to one’s gender.

Gender discrimination in nationality laws has far-reaching consequences on all aspects of family life and is a leading cause of statelessness. Without citizenship, children and foreign spouses are often subject to a range of restrictions in their job and education opportunities; their ability to travel, open bank accounts, own or inherit property; and their full participation in society generally. Women’s inability to equally confer citizenship can put huge financial, psychological and physical strains on families, which can result in intergenerational poverty. Nine of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are negatively impacted by this form of legal discrimination. Discriminatory nationality laws can threaten family unity, and in some cases, increase the potential for family violence. In contexts of displacement, where fathers may often be separated from their families, discriminatory nationality laws have the potential to impact exponentially larger populations. With the greatest displacement since World War II,

<sup>1</sup> Such laws include denying women the right to confer nationality on non-national spouses on an equal basis with men, and linking women’s ability to acquire, change, and retain her nationality to her marital status.



current displacement and migration from countries with gender-discriminatory nationality laws threatens to create a new generation of stateless children.

Though such laws were traditionally the norm across the globe, significant progress has been achieved in securing gender-equal nationality rights. In the past fourteen years, fifteen States have reformed their nationality laws to advance gender equality, with three countries having enacted reforms in the past year alone (Madagascar, Sierra Leone, United States). Momentum for reform is also increasing at the regional level, indicated by: an October 2017 Arab Conference on Good Practices & Regional Opportunities to Strengthen Women’s Nationality Rights, hosted by the Secretariat of the League of Arab States; the endorsement by all ECOWAS members of the 2015 Abidjan Declaration, which calls on Member States to uphold gender-equal nationality laws; and a pending Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Right to Nationality, presently under consideration by the African Union. At the international level: the UN Women-led “Roadmap to Substantive Equality 2030,” seeks the reform of all gender-discriminatory laws by 2030 through global and multi-sectoral partnership; in November 2017 UNHCR marked the fourth anniversary of its #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness, with Action 3 of the Campaign’s Global Action Plan focused on ending gender discrimination in nationality laws; UNICEF is supporting efforts to achieve gender-equal nationality rights, through the UNICEF-UNHCR Coalition on Every Child’s Right to a Nationality; and in June 2016, [107 Member States cosponsored](#) the UN Human Rights Council Resolution, “[The Right to a Nationality: Women’s Equal Nationality Rights in Law and Practice.](#)”

**Format**

The High-Level Side Event will be led by a panel of speakers comprising an affected person; Member States that have recently taken action to remove gender discrimination from their nationality laws; a representative of a regional intergovernmental body; a representative from the UN Agencies; and a civil society representative.

Following presentations by the panelists, the floor will be opened to States who wish to announce commitments to reform their laws or to make interventions from the floor, as well as audience questions and comments. The discussion will be facilitated by the panel moderator.