



SOUTHERN AFRICA CIVIL SOCIETY APPEAL TO SADC STATES: END STATELESSNESS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

We, civil society organisations across the region advocating for universal access to the right to a nationality and the eradication of statelessness, met for a two-day engagement in September 2021 co-hosted by the Southern African Nationality Network (SANN) and the UNHCR. The objective of the engagement was to reflect on the role of civil society in the fight against statelessness and to take stock of progress that has been made towards the eradication of statelessness in Southern Africa thus far. Including progress by SADC States.

States have the power to establish who their nationals are. This makes them responsible for the legal and policy reforms that are necessary to end statelessness. In recent years, SADC States have taken some positive steps towards ending statelessness in the region. Government statelessness focals have been appointed. Eight countries have acceded to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons, and four countries have acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Prevention of Statelessness. Resolutions towards the eradication of statelessness have been adopted at the [Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa \(MIDSA\)](#), the [SADC Parliamentary Forum](#) and the [Pan African Parliament](#). Additionally, several pledges to address statelessness have been submitted by SADC States at the [High Level Engagement](#) on statelessness (2011), the [High Level Segment](#) on statelessness (2019) and the [Global Refugee Forum](#) (2019) hosted by the UNHCR.

However, statelessness remains a growing problem in the region.

Statelessness in Southern Africa is primarily linked to colonialism, border changes, migration, arbitrary deprivation of nationality, gaps or conflict in nationality laws, discrimination against particular ethnic or religious groups or based on gender or race, and poor civil registration systems. There is no confirmed data on the exact number of stateless people in Southern Africa owing to a lack of a dedicated mechanism to measure statelessness or a Statelessness Determination Procedure; but according to a study done by the [African Commission on Human and People's Rights](#), hundreds of thousands, possibly millions of Africans do not have access to a nationality and may be stateless.

Statelessness has a devastating impact on affected persons, as nationality is a fundamental prerequisite to have complete access to civil, political and socio-economic rights. Stateless people can face a lifetime of discrimination, social injustices and denial of basic human rights. They often live in precarious conditions on the margins of society without access to education, healthcare or employment. They are unable to obtain identity documents, travel documents or to register births, deaths and marriages. They struggle to find a sense of belonging and worth. When it is present on a large scale, statelessness can also fuel displacement and instability, and compromise any efforts to achieve sustainable development on a national and regional level.



While acknowledging the importance of the role of civil society in the fight against statelessness, ending statelessness is only possible through State action. We therefore call upon SADC States to accelerate efforts to end statelessness in the region by:

1. adopting a Ministerial Declaration and regional action plan with concrete strategies and allocated resources to reduce, prevent and ultimately end statelessness in the SADC region;
2. acceding to the 1954 United Nations Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 United Nations Convention on the Prevention of Statelessness;
3. ensuring the prompt adoption and domestication of the African Union's Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa that addresses Africa's unique challenges with respect to statelessness; and
4. promoting and implementing universal birth registration in line with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We, as civil society, commit to support and collaborate with SADC States towards the realisation of the eradication of statelessness in Southern Africa.

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For expressions of interest or enquires please contact: thandekac@lhr.org.za

For more information on SANN visit our website: <http://sann.africa/>

Signed in acknowledgment of receipt and on behalf of the SADC Secretariat

Name:

Designation:

Date: