

United Nations Forum on Minority Issues

Video statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet

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Greetings.

The Forum on Minority Issues is a unique platform for Member States to engage with minorities, civil society organisations and UN bodies, to share policies and practices, and to develop recommendations to uphold the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

I welcome the focus of this year's Forum on statelessness.

To be stateless often means being deprived of access to many essential human rights and fundamental freedoms. In many cases, stateless people face a life without education or employment opportunities, and without adequate access to medical care or other basic public services, including access to justice. Statelessness may also make them particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

And it does not just happen. People are *made* stateless – by policies which fail to ensure that all persons are provided with a nationality without discrimination.

Studies have shown that three quarters of the world's stateless people belong to minorities.

Minorities may be particularly susceptible to being forcibly displaced within their country – or forced to migrate – both of which make them vulnerable to becoming stateless.

And it is also true that stateless people – many of whom are minorities – are more vulnerable to forced displacement and migration

This vulnerability is often particularly acute for stateless women – who may also be prevented from enjoying a range of human rights, including their sexual and reproductive

health and rights – and children, who may also then suffer denial of education and other fundamental rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms the core principle that human beings should enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms without discrimination.

The right to a nationality, which forms part of those rights, is so fundamental that it is recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in numerous other core international human rights instruments.

We need States to take positive steps to combat statelessness for everyone, but notably minorities. There are very good ways to do this, including through ensuring access, without discrimination, to birth registration and key documentation for acquiring nationality.

I hope this Forum will shed light on this vital, but often overlooked, issue.

I regret that I cannot participate in your discussions over the next two days, but I look forward to reviewing your ideas and recommendations on how all stakeholders – including my Office – can act to prevent and combat statelessness affecting minorities, and to ensure the right to a nationality for all.

Thank you