

## THEME 2: CITIZENSHIP & RIGHTS

In this theme, participants reflect on their position in society and the opportunities that they have as citizens of a country by exploring the concepts of citizenship and rights. Teaching about statelessness in this context helps participants to understand how exclusion can lead to discrimination and the denial of rights, allowing them to develop empathy for people who are ‘stuck’ outside the system and to think about how we could build a world that is more equal.

### What can be found in this theme?

This theme is structured around six activities, divided into three learning units:

### UNIT 1: THE WORLD AND OUR PLACE IN IT

**2.1 A: The passport** urges learners to reflect on the role of passports and the benefits of having one as a way of exploring what citizenship is and why it is significant.

**2.1 B: Letter to a stateless child** invites participants to reflect on the importance of citizenship and understand the situation stateless people find themselves in, by writing a letter.

### UNIT 2: CREATIVITY AND CRITICAL THINKING

**2.2 A: Reflect on a photograph** allows learners to discover the power of images to convey information and emotion while deepening their understanding of a life without a nationality.

**2.2b: Statelessness in the news** offers learners the opportunity to critically reflect on how media portrays stateless people.

### UNIT 3: RIGHTS AND ACTIVISM

**2.3a: Rights for all children** invites learners to reflect on the rights that all children should enjoy no matter their nationality status by exploring the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

**2.3b: Stand up for your rights** engages participants in human rights activism by designing campaign material to advocate for the rights of stateless children.

## **How are the activities connected to *The Girl Who Lost Her Country*?**

Neha's encounters in *The Girl Who Lost Her Country* raise certain questions that are addressed in this theme and the relevant parts of the book:

- Question 3: Is it your birth certificate that gives you a nationality? (p.17, 52)
- Question 4: What kind of things are children who don't have a nationality not able to do? (p.21, 53)
- Question 6: Why can't countries make sure all children get a nationality, even if they don't know where they were born or who their parents were? (p.24, 56)

Real-world examples encountered by Neha and included in this theme show how denying a person citizenship limits their ability to enjoy other rights and to participate in society:

- Aasif from the Bajau Laut community who cannot go to school because Malaysia does not recognise Bajau Laut as nationals. (p. 30-33)
- Talia who has not been provided with a birth certificate by the Dominican Republic due to her Haitian migratory background. (p. 17-21)
- Grace, a foundling in Cote d'Ivoire, who fears that she won't be able to go to school or travel because she doesn't have a birth certificate. (p.21-22)

## **Before you begin**

Before you begin with any of the activities, take a look at the main issues that will come up in this theme. You can also ease the participants into the activities in the form of a warm-up discussion around the concepts set out below.

## **Citizenship**

Having a citizenship is like holding the official membership of a country. Once you are 'in' and are a member of the country, you have access to the benefits that come along with that membership: you can enjoy the rights of citizens of that country. Citizenship also offers a sense of belonging – to a place and to a community – and recognition of your place in the world. Each country has its own rules about how you can become a member: rules (or laws) that set out which people are granted nationality. Some countries give nationality to anybody born there. Other countries give nationality to anybody who has a parent from the country. Most countries allow people who have lived there for a long time or married someone from the country, to apply for nationality. In this way the real-life connections that a person has with a country form the basis for becoming a national. Sometimes things go wrong and a person's real-life connections do not allow them to access citizenship in any country. This leaves them stateless and excluded from the benefits of citizenship. It also means that they are treated as outsiders and may suffer from prejudice, xenophobia and discrimination.

## **Rights**

(Human) rights are the rights that every single person in the world has, such as being able to go to school or see a doctor. No matter their nationality, race, sex, religion etc., everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination. There is also a special set of human rights specifically for children, often known as "child rights". However, stateless people around the world are often unable to participate in life in the same way as others and enjoy rights such as going to school, seeing a doctor or having a job. That is because certain countries require individuals who live within their borders to have a nationality to be able to enjoy these rights. This is clearly wrong, goes against every human's rights and must be changed. No matter if a person is stateless, he/she should be able to enjoy all human rights!

If you choose to start a discussion prior to the activities here are some questions about citizenship and rights you may ask the participants. These questions can also pop up during the activities:

- What is citizenship? How would you explain it to someone else?
- How can a person get citizenship when they are born? Can a person only have the citizenship that they get at birth? How else can a person get citizenship?
- What rights does a person have as a citizen of a country?
- What happens if you are not able to have a citizenship? How would it feel if you were not able to belong to a country via having citizenship, but everyone else around you did?
- Do you know what country you are a citizen of? How did you become a citizen of that country? What rights do you have as a result of being a citizen of your particular country?

### **Key Takeaways of this theme:**

1. Citizenship may be something we cannot see or touch, but it makes a big difference in our lives. Understanding the role of a passport and what life would look like without access to one helps us to understand the impact statelessness can have.
2. Communicating with stateless people is a great way to show support and better understand their position in society.
3. Statelessness can be portrayed in different ways throughout the media so it is important to be a critical media consumer.
4. There are different ways to advocate for the rights of stateless people around the world. It can take a lot of time and hard work but we can all make a difference.

### **Key words**

Citizenship/Nationality; Rights; Participation; Discrimination; (In)equality; (In)tolerance.

## UNIT 1: THE WORLD AND OUR PLACE IN IT

In this learning unit learners reflect on the role of passports and the benefits of holding one as a way of exploring what citizenship is and why it is significant. To better understand and empathise with the position stateless people have in society and some of the hardships they might face, learners are then asked to show their solidarity by writing a letter to a stateless child.

### 2.1 A: THE PASSPORT

Citizenship is something you cannot see or touch, so it can be hard to understand or explain what it is. A passport makes citizenship tangible: it is a document given by countries to their citizens. It recognises citizens as full members of the community who enjoy certain rights and responsibilities. However, not everyone is able to obtain a passport because not everyone has citizenship somewhere. Without any nationality, people who are stateless are unable to get a passport and face difficulties when it comes to accessing various services and travelling.



**The passport** is an activity that urges learners to critically inquire into how passports transform the idea of citizenship to something tangible and enable people to enjoy their rights as citizens of a country and how stateless people lacking a nationality and thus a passport are excluded from enjoying such rights.

### 2.1 B: LETTER TO A STATELESS CHILD

One way to better appreciate the value of citizenship and to understand how stateless children go through life is by writing a letter that builds a connection or opens a conversation around these issues. That way we can also let them know that they are not alone and that others care about the challenges that are affecting them.



**Letter to a stateless child** is a creative writing project challenging participants to reflect on the importance of citizenship and understand the situation stateless people find themselves in. Drawing inspiration from what they have learnt about citizenship, rights and statelessness, participants are invited to write a letter to a stateless child.

## 2.1 A: The passport

### Instructions:

Watch this video on passports:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRvaT4Jgv2Q>;

followed by this short clip from the movie “The Terminal”, starring Tom Hanks, which portrays the limbo that many stateless people find themselves trapped in due to not having a nationality and being without a passport:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHPVY\\_j2HDY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHPVY_j2HDY).

If no internet connection is available, discuss the following with the group:

### 1. What is a passport?

- *A passport is a document issued by the authorities of a country that verifies that an individual is a citizen of that country, his/her identity (full name, nationality, date and place of birth) and gives them the right to travel under its protection.*

### 2. What is the function of a passport?

- *Passports are used as proof of nationality. When you possess a passport, this means that your country of origin vouches for you, assuring other nations that you are in fact the person you say you are. If you have the passport of country X, this is the country that you formally ‘belong’ to and where you should be able to enjoy rights as a citizen.*

### 3. Is it possible for a country to revoke a passport?

- *As countries control the passport system, apart from issuing a passport, a country can also revoke your passport. Some countries have rules allowing them to take away the nationality and passports of people who do very bad things – for instance if they join wars against their own country or engage in acts of terrorism. Sometimes these laws are used in the wrong way to target activists, journalists or peaceful protestors and their children, although they haven’t done anything wrong. Sometimes countries also decide to withdraw nationality from their own citizens for other reasons, for instance because they consider ethnic or religious minority groups to be outsiders. And sometimes people fail to acquire any nationality to begin with. In other words, there are lots of ways in which people can end up without a nationality – and therefore without a passport – as shown in the stories of the different people Neha encounters in the book.*

After watching the two videos or discussing the questions set out above, remind participants that if a person is stateless, they are unable to get a passport from any country so their ability to enjoy the rights of a citizen such as travelling internationally legally is pretty much non-existent. Ask them to discuss the following questions:

1. What are some solutions to the issue of stateless individuals not having a passport? Can you think of any way of making it possible for those who are stateless to travel freely?
2. One group of individuals had the idea of making a world citizen passport for anyone to have. You can read about this organisation and what they are trying to do here: <http://www.worldservice.org/docpass.html>
  - a. What do you think of the idea of having a world citizen passport?
  - b. Why do you think this idea has not caught on?

**Duration:** 45 minutes

**Level of complexity:** 1

### Knowledge/Subjects:

Civics, Geography, Governance, International Relations, Politics

### Skills:

Comparative Analysis, Critical thinking, Persuasive Argumentation, Research, Self-Awareness

**Values/Attitudes:** Sense of identity

### Objectives:

- For participants to explore how passports transform the idea of citizenship into something tangible and help people to understand the rights that they enjoy as citizens of a country.
- For participants to understand that as stateless people lack a nationality and thus a passport, they are excluded from enjoying the rights of a citizen.

**Materials:** Internet access (optional)

### **Further the Activity**

Different countries' passports grant individuals different sets of rights and even different levels of access to other countries! To explore this, have participants look at two websites and explore differences between passports. Give participants between 10-15 minutes and then have a group discussion on what they found and whether different countries' passports should have different power. (<https://www.henleypassportindex.com/passport>, <https://www.passportindex.org>). You can also turn the discussion into a debate forming two groups to debate on the fairness of a system where one passport is 'valued' higher than another.

## 2.1 B: Letter to a stateless child

### Instructions:

1. As a group, read the “Letter to a Stateless Child” found on page 78-80 of the book or in Appendix VI.
2. After reading the letter together, you might want to have a brief discussion about it. Have participants discuss with their neighbour or in small groups. Examples of questions to discuss include:
  - a. What are some messages that the authors of this letter have for stateless children?
  - b. What emotions do the authors express?
  - c. Were there any parts in the letter that you particularly liked? Why?
3. Have participants write their own letter to one of the three stateless children who Neha meets on her travels and are referred to above. Invite participants to explain who they are and that they are learning about statelessness and citizenship and express what they feel they’ve learned so far. Encourage them to be creative and to think both about what it is they want to say as well as how they want to say it.

Send your letters to ISI at [neha@institutesi.org](mailto:neha@institutesi.org). They might even be included on our website or shared with other people around the world who are learning about statelessness or working to address it.

### Further the Activity:

It is important to bring attention to the issue of statelessness that so many people are facing. One way is by making sure that government officials know about it so that they take action. A great way is by letter/email. Even if you cannot vote yet, the elected officials are still supposed to look out for your interests if you live in an area that they are representing (e.g. members of the parliament, local authorities etc.). If enough people reach out and let a government official know that statelessness is an issue that they want to see addressed, then the chances of the issue being taken up increase greatly. Before you begin, it might be helpful to look at an example letter in Appendix VII.

**Duration:** 60+ minutes

**Level of complexity:** 2

### Knowledge/Subjects:

Civics, Social Studies, Writing

### Skills:

Critical thinking, Empathy, Persuasive Argumentation, Self-Awareness

**Values/Attitudes:** Sense of identity

### Objectives:

- For learners to reflect on the importance of citizenship and understand the situation stateless people find themselves in.

### Materials:

Piece of paper and pen/pencil (if preferred type the letter on a computer)

### Connection to

#### “The Girl Who Lost Her Country”:

In the Dominican Republic, Neha met Rosa and her daughter Talia. Talia has not been provided with a birth certificate by the Dominican Republic due to her Haitian background. In the Dominican Republic children and grandchildren of Haitian immigrants who could not show certain documents cannot be Dominican citizens, even though according to Dominican nationality law a child acquires the Dominican nationality if he/she is born in the country. Talia handed Neha a beautiful drawing on pink paper portraying Talia’s emotions. “When I do not have a birth certificate and my sister or mother go to run errands to try to get papers and they do not appear, I feel sad. If I don’t have my birth certificate I will not be able to study.” (Neha’s Book p. 17-21)

In Cote d’Ivoire, Neha met Grace, an orphan girl who doesn’t know her parents. Grace explained to her that in Cote d’Ivoire it is very hard to get nationality without your parents’ documents. “Ivorians must provide their birth certificate and the nationality certificate of a parent as proof of their own nationality. I don’t have any of those things, so I cannot prove that my parents were Ivorian. They call me a foundling and I have heard some grownups say that I am stateless. If, one day, I can no longer go to school, I would be very unhappy”, she says. “In Cote d’Ivoire stateless people cannot do many things, like working or opening a bank account,

things, like working or opening a bank account, they can't own land or even move freely inside the country. My dream is to travel" (Neha's Book p. 22-23)

In Malaysia Neha met Aasif. He and the other children told her that they are Bajau Laut. "We live on these boats... and we work here". We have to help our parents, we don't go to school so sometimes we go fishing or pound cassava or rice." Neha later learned that they cannot go to school because Malaysia does not recognise them as nationals. (Neha's Book p. 31-33)

## UNIT 2: CREATIVITY AND CRITICAL THINKING

This learning unit focuses on how statelessness is portrayed in the media and allows learners to contemplate on how stateless people go through life. By reflecting on what photographs tell the viewer and comparing this to how newspaper articles discuss stories of statelessness and what vocabulary they use, learners can evaluate and compare how each source of information communicates the issue of statelessness.

### 2.2 A: REFLECT ON A PHOTOGRAPH

Photographs can be used to express the realities of a life without a nationality. As each individual is unique and complex, stateless persons do not experience a one-dimensional life as sometimes assumed. In this sense, photographs can be used to educate, send messages, and share experiences by saying a story through images in a different way to words.



**Reflect on a photograph** is a creative activity involving a discussion of photographic portraits of stateless individuals, helping participants to discover the power of images to convey information and emotion while deepening their understanding of a life without a nationality.

### 2.2 B: STATELESSNESS IN THE NEWS

Reading the news and other media is a great way to learn more about the world and societal issues. However, it is equally important to be a critical media consumer as there are different viewpoints and different ways of reporting. Sometimes the media can help a cause through fair and accurate reporting but other times it can reinforce prejudice and exclusion.



**Statelessness in the news** is a critical literacy assignment in which participants review news articles relating to statelessness to identify what message is being communicated and how. Participants are also encouraged to evaluate how media portrays stateless people, the subconscious effects of media representation and the multifaceted ways of presenting information.

## 2.2 A: Reflect on a photograph

### Instructions:

Introduce the group to the work of the award-winning photographer Greg Constantine and his project Nowhere People  
<http://www.nowherepeople.org/the-project>.

Greg first learned about statelessness in 2002, and in 2005 he embarked on what would turn out to be a ten-year journey documenting statelessness around the world. He has published three books of photographs of his journey, shown his work in exhibitions, and integrated his photographs and the stories of stateless people in a multimedia website. As a group you can also read Greg's letter to stateless children located on pages 74-76 in Neha's book (also in Appendix IX) and/or watch Greg's TEDx talk on statelessness here:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9DD6MZj5Z4&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9DD6MZj5Z4&feature=emb_title)

According to Greg: *“Photography is a language and it’s a language that needs to be included in discussions because it’s far too easy for the voices and the stories of the dispossessed and unwanted to actually just become lost”* (TEDx talk 2016, London).

This activity is about reflecting on his photography of statelessness.

**1.** Ideally, participants would be divided into small groups of 3-4.

**2.** Hand out a photograph to each group (if possible, have each group analyse a different photograph). You can assign photographs from Neha's book, make copies of the photographs (in Appendix VIII) or visit Greg Constantine's website <http://www.nowherepeople.org/> and select the photographs you would like the participants to analyse.

**3.** Each small group will discuss and analyse the photograph they have been given for 5-10 minutes. They will then share with the group the photograph they have as well as their thoughts and interpretation of it. After sharing, other participants can ask questions or give their own thoughts on the photograph.

**4.** It might be helpful to provide a list of questions for the participants to use as they begin analysing the photograph. However, they do not just have to use these questions and should feel free to discuss whatever comes to them as they look at the photograph. You can also do an example of photograph analysis with the whole group before you begin and/or have participants draw inspiration from two children's reflections on these photographs available at: <http://www.kids.worldsstateless.org/act/reflect-photograph>

### Example of questions:

- What is the first thing you notice when you look at this photograph?
- Is there anything striking about the use of light and shadow?
- What emotions do you see in the photograph? What emotions do you feel when you look at this photograph?
- What does the photo tell you about the person portrayed?
- Do you think there is a (particular) message that the photo is trying to convey about statelessness? If so, what is the message?
- Does this photograph relate to the concepts of citizenship, rights, identity or exclusion? In what way?

**Duration:** 45 minutes

**Level of complexity:** 2

### Knowledge/Subjects:

Art, Civics, Photography, Social Activism, Social Studies

### Skills:

Comparative Analysis, Creativity, Critical thinking, Deductive reasoning, Empathy

### Values/Attitudes:

Sense of identity, Value diversity

### Objectives:

- For participants to discover the power of images to convey information and emotion while deepening their understanding of a life without a nationality.

### Materials:

Internet Access or copies of photos from Neha's book located on pages 23, 52, 53, 55 59, at <http://www.nowherepeople.org/> or in Appendix VIII. If unable to make copies, you can show the entire group a photograph from Neha's book or the teacher's guide and then either discuss the photograph as a group or have the participants discuss it in small groups. Note: Be sure to allow the participants the opportunity to look at the picture multiple times!

**Further the Activity**

Discuss what participants would photograph if they were told to photograph anything that made them think about citizenship, rights, identity and/or exclusion. If possible, ask them to think about these topics over the week/week-end and take any pictures that remind them of those terms. Ask them to share their pictures and do a photograph analysis with the whole group.

## 2.2 B: Statelessness in the news

### Instructions:

**1.** Assign the participants (either in small groups or individually) one of the articles below to examine. Feel free to also add / use local articles about statelessness or others that might be particularly relevant for the group. You can find the articles in Appendix X. Here are the links to the originals:

**Article A.** Living in a sea of trash: Sabah's stateless children face bleak future:

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/sabah-stateless-children-sea-gypsies-bajau-laut-11561194>

**Article B.** Stateless kids causing a headache for Sabah authorities:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/hundreds-thousands-rohingya-people-are-trapped-stateless-limbo>

**Article C.** Thousands find themselves stateless in the Dominican Republic:

[https://cronkite.asu.edu/buffett/dr/the\\_stateless.html](https://cronkite.asu.edu/buffett/dr/the_stateless.html)

**Article D.** Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people trapped in stateless limbo:

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/02/09/stateless-pelahu-kids-causing-a-headache-for-sabah-authorities>

**Article E.** I found a country, but lost my brother - Stateless activist:

<http://news.trust.org/item/20191006223443-qazhk/>

**2.** Give the participants 15-20 minutes to go through their articles and to examine how statelessness, citizenship and rights are discussed in the article. Have the participants think about and write down answers to the following questions (if applicable to their article):

- a. What is the article about? Is statelessness the main topic? What other topics are being discussed?
- b. Who is talking about statelessness? (Is it the author, an expert quoted, stateless people etc.)
- c. What tone is the author/speaker using to talk about statelessness/citizenship/rights? Why do you think this is?
- d. Are stateless people portrayed as outsiders, victims or a problem group?
- e. Is there a message that is trying to be conveyed about statelessness? If so, what do you think that message is?
- f. Do you think this is an accurate representation of statelessness? If not, what do you think is misrepresented or not represented completely?
- g. How are newspaper articles different from photographs when telling a story? Were you able to form your own conclusions based on facts or did you feel the story was leading you to particular conclusions?

### Further the Activity:

Statelessness can be portrayed through several media. A great way to discuss about the issue is through comics! Shapeless Shapes is a beautifully designed graphic novel about identity, belonging, history, freedom, discrimination, injustice, activism and statelessness. You can order a copy of the physical book through online book sellers or read it as an ebook here: [https://files.institutesi.org/Shapeless\\_shapes.pdf](https://files.institutesi.org/Shapeless_shapes.pdf)

**Duration:** 45-60 minutes

**Level of complexity:** 3

### Knowledge/Subjects:

Civics, Media Studies, Social Studies, Politics

### Skills:

Comparative Analysis, Critical thinking, Deductive reasoning, Empathy, Reading Comprehension, Research

### Values/Attitudes:

Sense of identity, Value diversity

### Objectives:

- For participants to critically reflect on how media portrays stateless people, the subconscious effects of media representation and the multifaceted ways of presenting information.

### Materials:

Copies of the news articles (one for each group of 3-4)

## UNIT 3: RIGHTS AND ACTIVISM

This learning unit invites children to reflect on the rights that all children should enjoy and how not having a nationality limits access to rights, against the backdrop of a discussion of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Participants are then urged to educate others on the issues that stateless children face as a first step towards inspiring people to engage with the issue and advocate for change.

### 2.3 A: RIGHTS FOR ALL CHILDREN

The CRC is a specifically designed treaty to protect childhood and contains the rights all children should have including the right to health, education, family life, play and recreation, an adequate standard of living and protection from abuse and harm. As these rights are afforded to all children no matter their nationality status, the CRC can be used to advocate for the right to nationality for every child across the world.

**Rights for all children** introduces children to child rights and invites them to envision a document containing all the rights children should have no matter their nationality status. It also introduces them to the CRC, the most important child rights treaty in the world, and invites them to utilise it to advocate for the rights of stateless children.



### 2.3 B: STAND UP FOR YOUR RIGHTS

Educating others on the difficulties stateless children face is a great way to show support and inspire a great number of people to advocate for the issue. We can all make a difference. Start by educating others!



**Stand up for your rights** is an activism-driven project aiming at empowering participants to engage in human rights activism by designing campaign material to advocate for the rights of stateless children.

## 2.3 A: Rights for all children

### Instructions:

1. Reflect on the “**Questions by Stateless Children**” and think of some of the examples we have read about in Neha’s book. What issues do children in different countries face when trying to claim their nationality? What other rights might be denied to them?
2. Not having a nationality limits children’s access to other rights such as going to school, seeing a doctor etc. How do you feel about that? Should children be deprived of their rights due to lack of nationality? What rights do you think all children should have?
3. As a group, draft a document containing all the rights children should have! You can invite a participant to write the group’s ideas on the board or on a piece of paper and when the document is complete ask all participants to sign it.
4. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a treaty of the United Nations that sets out the rights every child should have including the right to go to school, see a doctor etc. Compare your document to the actual CRC available in a child - friendly version here: <https://www.unicef.org/media/56661/file> Which rights are missing, what extra rights have you included compared to the actual CRC? Do you think the CRC makes it clear that no matter their nationality status, children should enjoy all the rights included in the treaty? If the CRC protects the rights of all children, why are stateless children unable to enjoy their rights?

### Further the Activity:

The CRC is a great tool for raising the issue of statelessness and advocating for the rights of stateless children. Almost all UN countries have signed the CRC and made a commitment to protecting the rights of all children as set out in the treaty. To make sure enough is being done and hold countries accountable for fulfilling the rights set out in the treaty, a special committee of UN experts has been established to monitor what is happening around the world: the CRC Committee. NGOs and activists report to the CRC Committee so it will push countries to implement child rights friendly measures. Children can advocate for their rights too! Check out this short guide about a new United Nations treaty that lets you speak up about child rights violations in your country and how to submit a complaint:

- [https://www.childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/OP3\\_CF\\_Leaflet\\_En\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/OP3_CF_Leaflet_En_FINAL.pdf)
- <https://opic.childrightsconnect.org/what-is-opic/how-to-submit-an-individual-communication/>

You can also ask local organisations or people you know, like your local children’s rights contact person or your teacher, how you could bring up the issue of statelessness in your area and encourage people to start a campaign and advocate for the issue. Or pick another child rights problem that you feel passionately about or you see affecting people in your community and get involved in ensuring that it gets the attention that it deserves.

**Duration:** 45 minutes

**Level of complexity:** 3

### Knowledge/Subjects:

Civics, International Relations, Politics, Social Activism

### Skills:

Activism, Comparative Analysis, Critical Thinking, Empathy, Group Collaboration, Reading Comprehension, Research

### Values/Attitudes:

Belief that people can bring about change, Respect for people & human rights

### Objectives:

- For participants to reflect on the rights that all children should enjoy and how not having a nationality limits access to other rights.
- For participants to learn about the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and utilise it to advocate for the rights of stateless children around the world.

**Materials:** Internet access (optional)

## Questions by Stateless Children



Why is it that my brothers have documents,  
but (like so many other girls) I do not?  
– *Zalina, 19 years old, Tajikistan*

How long will I have to wait to have  
equal rights with other people? I have been  
fighting for this my whole life.  
– *Phra, Thailand*



What will happen if I never continue  
my education beyond this year?  
– *Sheellin, 15 years old, Malaysia*

Does the world care about us?  
How much longer must I wait?  
– *Andrew, South Africa*



## 2.3 B: Stand up for your rights

### Instructions:

1. In small groups, or individually, read the short story “The Certificate” located below.

*Note: this story was written to be performed as a monologue and so is highly suitable to be read out loud!*

2. Have a short discussion about “The Certificate”. Some potential questions include:

- a. What questions is the narrator trying to get answered? Why can she not get answers to these questions?
  - *She is trying to figure out how to get her rights that are being denied to her. However, the legal system is very complicated, and no one has really given her a straight answer. Her mum and herself go to many offices but haven't been able to figure out how to get her birth certificate, be recognised as a citizen and gain her rights.*
- b. What are the differences between how men and women are treated in the story?
  - *Women are not able to pass on their nationality to their children, so they need to have a man in their lives if they want their children to easily get a nationality. Without that, children may end up stateless.*
- c. Why is the narrator's mum upset and why does she tell her daughter that her certificates do not matter?
  - *Her mum is upset because she switched her certificates file with her mum's documents file, but all the papers in the documents file have been carefully collected because they are needed to try and get the daughter's birth certificate. Without a birth certificate, the daughter wouldn't be able to get an advanced education even though she was very good at school and gained a lot of certificates.*
- d. What answer would you give the narrator to the last question of the story, which asks, “what in the world makes this [confirmation of her birth] so difficult to admit?”

3. After discussing the story, invite the participants to advocate for children who are stateless. Have the participants pick an issue that affects stateless children (such as inability to take school exams, get healthcare, etc.) that they would like to educate others on.

4. Have either the instructor or the participants choose what kind of product they will make to educate others on the issue facing stateless children. The product could be a postcard, a poster, a cartoon, a comic strip, or a video. Before the participants get started on their product, encourage them to read Neha's success story (located on p. 81-83 in Neha's book) so they can see how dedication and hard work have resulted in Neha regaining her rights. You can also watch Maha Mamo's inspiring story about how she became a citizen for the first time at the age of thirty and is now an activist on statelessness here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzffChmXKyA>

### Further the Activity:

If you are in a school environment, have the students organise a presentation of their work for another class. The students could present to smaller groups or to the entire class at once. You could also display the students' work in the hallway or include it in the school paper. If there is time, “The Certificate” could be performed as a monologue by a student (or students who split it into parts) for the other class before the class presents their own work.

**Duration:** 60 minutes

**Level of complexity:** 2

### Knowledge/Subjects:

Art, Civics, Literature, Politics, Social Activism

### Skills:

Activism, Creativity, Critical thinking, Empathy, Persuasive Argumentation, Reading Comprehension

### Values/Attitudes:

Belief that people can bring about change

### Objectives:

- For participants to think about what it takes for a stateless child to gain their rights.
- For participants to engage in human rights activism to advocate for the rights of stateless children.

### Materials:

Copies or display of the short story “The Certificate”, Art supplies

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## The Certificate

By Ruwanthie de Chickera

I have a few questions that no one can answer. So, I have stopped asking them.

I don't have a problem understanding things. I understand lots of things. I understand ... things better than most kids my age. My mom says I understand most things better than her.

But she says that probably because ... she can't read, you know... And, of course, because she's my mom... and all...

But hey... It's important to try and understand things for yourself. That is what I think.

Like... I think kids and adults live in different worlds. And it's not that one world has toys and balloons and colours and is full of shorter, lisping people and stuff ... no, it's like a world of different rules. One set of rules for kids and the adults have different rules for the very same thing. It's like kids are taught about a world that adults don't really, really believe in, you know...

Like we learn in school that policemen are good and the governments look after people, and that it's bad to lie and that everyone has equal rights and that every child is special and la di da...

Well, nothing about my life has been like this. It was confusing for a very long time. Then I just decided that adults lie. They lie all the time. Once you figure that out – all this makes sense.

-----  
My mom always takes me with her when she has to go to meet people to 'sort out our lives.' This generally means a lot of time spent in queues. And a lot, a lot a lott of time filling out forms and writing letters and then telling our story.... Over and over and over again...

My mother never seems to get tired of telling our story. I am frankly just sick of it. But my mom, she knows how to tell our story – she knows the voice, the expression all of it. It's like switching a button.

'So... tell us your story...'

Click.

Oh man... she's repeated that same old story so many times to so many people ...

I watch her. Her mouth speaks the words but I can see her heart leaving her body. It just leaves.

And she becomes very, very small and very, very ... empty. She's been getting the same answers to the questions she has been asking for all of my life. That is more than 14 years. But she still asks these questions. She asks all of them. Every single one. Just in case one of them will be answered differently.

My mom's a clever lady. She can't read letters but she can read faces. My mother knows what someone is going to say before they say it (maybe even before they know it). This is probably why she talks without stopping. Because she tries to get in as many words as possible before they say what she knew they were going to say all along.

Me? I have just stopped asking the questions which I know no one will answer.

-----  
Whenever we go out to 'sort out our lives', we take our 'documents file' with us. And before and after every meeting mama gets me to count the papers in the file and put them all in order. There are 63. Without the photocopies. The documents file is the most important thing in our house. Most important. Mama always says, if there is a bomb or a flood or anything, take the documents file and run.

-----  
My mom is dead proud of me. I keep winning all kinds of certificates in school. I have a whole pile of them, for almost every subject. Studying comes easy to me. I remember one of my certificates was for a speech I gave on my country. I spoke of this country like I belonged here...

My teacher said it was brilliant. But she sounded more sad than proud and she couldn't look me in the eye.

When I was smaller, I used to make my own certificates. 'this is to certify that (XX) completed (YY) on this day.'" And I would sign it. My mother got certificates for all sorts of things she did for us. My father got certificates for smiling and making jokes. This was to encourage him to do these things. My father is a horrible man. I wish she would leave him. But she says that our problems will be bigger if we were on our own. I don't quite see how. But my mother says that until the laws treat women the same way they treat men, women will always have to keep a man with them.

These are the kind of 'grown up things' that I know about.

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I worry about my younger sister. I love her very much and I would not change her for anything else except that this world is so cruel to girls.

My sister is very funny. She has a very funny understanding of the world. She believes that countries are different colours. Because in the world map in her classroom, all the countries are different colours. I tried to explain to her that this was not really how the world was divided. But she imagines that from out of space, if you look at the world, you really see all these different countries in different colours. She loves to tell people that our father came from a green country and our mother is from a purple country, where we live. Where we were born. She tells everyone that this is her country. My sister is still young.

-----  
My mom and I fought the other day. I switched the documents file with my certificates file. The documents file has 63 documents – and it's a really good file. But my certificate file now has over 81 certificates. And I am scared I might lose some.

'Idiot child, what are you doing?'

'I need a bigger file mama... I got three more certificates from school this term...'

'The documents file!'

'It's a bigger file, I need a bigger file for my certificates...'

'Your certificates don't matter.'

'You're saying that because you are stupid.'

'You are stupid. All those certificates don't mean a thing ...'

Then she hit me, and she cried.

Later she said she was sorry. She said she had been wrong. My certificates meant I was easily the best in my class, in my school, in the whole district, even in the country ... she said I could one day become the best in the whole world...

And as she spoke I saw her heart leave her body ... And I realised this happens when she cannot bear to hope.

That night... when she was busy... when she was... when my dad and she were arguing ... I found out what I already knew. It was easy. I knew the documents file and certificates file better than anyone. But I went through them both carefully. Just to be sure.

And I was right. And my mother was right. I had certificates that told me I could write and make things and play the flute and run fast and remember better, count better, reason better, the best in my class, school... But I didn't have a certificate that told me I was born. I didn't have a certificate to say this was my country. Without those, none of the rest mattered.

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Sometimes I get tired of the lies. I sometimes want to tell my teacher that what she is teaching us about this country, the world, is not true.

Without these certificates you can be treated like you are not really a human being. I have seen this happening to people in the queues. I have seen it happening to my mother. She has not let it happen to me yet.

We are taught by adults to say the truth and to be kind and responsible. But the truth is that I am a human being and kindness is to tell my mother that I will be always treated like I am a human being and responsibility is to give me a certificate saying that I am a human being so that my mother and I can stop standing in queues and filling out forms and repeating our story and being shouted at by strangers and being beaten by my dad... and just stop worrying and just start living because really, really, really, all these problems will stop. They will stop for us, forever. We don't need help with any of our other problems. Any other problem I can figure out how to solve.

I am not afraid. I just need someone to confirm that I am born.

What in the world makes this so difficult to admit?

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## **APPENDIX VI: Letter to a stateless child**

Dear friend,

We are writing to you because you are one of very many children in the world who are stateless. Because you have no nationality, the world has treated you unfairly. This is not your fault, or your parents'. Everyone is equal, and should be treated equally. We firmly believe this, and have spent many years working to achieve equality for all people.

The situation you are in may be like eight-year-old Elsa's, who was born in the Dominican Republic. Her mother was born in Haiti but has lived in the Dominican Republic for many years; her grandmother is a citizen of the Dominican Republic. But Elsa is not recognised as a Dominican. She will only be able to go to school until she is 10; after that she will need identity papers.

Or it may be a situation like Ivan's, born in Kosovo, the son of a Croatian mother and a Serbian father whose identity papers were destroyed during the war. When Ivan was very sick, the hospital refused to admit him because he did not have identity papers.

Or it may be like Subina's, who was born in Nepal. Her mother was not married. In Nepal, it is difficult for an unmarried woman to pass her nationality to her child. Subina told us: "I have always felt the same with my friends until the day when I had to fill up my form for School Leaving Certificate's board exam... all my friend's forms were accepted but not mine."

Or like many other children who have been made stateless for many other reasons.

But remember, you are unique and special. Your story is your own. You are the future of the world and you will be able to do great things, particularly if you are allowed to reach your potential.

You probably ask if the world cares about you. How much longer must you wait? And what can you do to make the world understand the situation you are in?

We believe you have been let down. It is very unfair that you are treated in this way. Everyone has the human right to have a nationality - to fully belong to a country. This means that every boy and girl should have identity papers, including a birth certificate. All children have this right, no matter who they are, where they live, what their parents do (or whether they have parents), what language they speak, what their religion is, whether they are a boy or a girl, what their culture is, whether they have a disability, and whether they are rich or poor. This is a human right for every child, promised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

But making this happen - achieving equality - is a battle which has had to be fought over and over again by many people in every country, including our own.

One of our grandmothers lost her citizenship when she married a man from another country. Another of our grandparents was stateless because the government of their country did not count Jews as citizens. The parents of another of us took in refugee boys in Europe who had to leave their own countries because they were being punished by a dictator. And all three of us have dear friends who lost their citizenship, or are themselves stateless now.

There is no excuse for you to suffer because of who your parents are or what your religion is or whether your mother could pass her citizenship to you. You have human rights, and you should be able to enjoy them.

We want you to know that there are people trying to stop statelessness happening, and to change the situation of those like you who are stateless now. It is frustrating, most of all for you, that there are not yet enough of us. But we do see signs of progress, with more people coming on board and greater understanding of why children are stateless, and what it means to have no nationality.

The United Nations is asking countries to change their laws, and some countries are beginning to do this. Ten refugee and stateless athletes led the opening parade at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, flying the Olympic flag, marching to the Olympic anthem, receiving a standing ovation by the entire stadium, honouring their talents and their courage.

Meanwhile we are awed by so many of you who are facing your situation with courage. We promise to continue working for you, and to encourage others to do so as well.

**Rachel Brett, Stefanie Grant, Linda K. Kerber**

## **APPENDIX VII: Letter to a government official**

[Your name]

[Your (school's) address]

[Name of the official]

[Office or Email Address]

[Date]

Subject: [Sentence summarising the topic / main message of the letter]

Dear [Name Member of Parliament],

I am/We are writing to you because I am/we are concerned about the issue of statelessness, especially stateless children in [your country, area, continent etc]. At school, I/we learned about the issue of childhood statelessness and I/we think the government should consider childhood statelessness as a serious problem because it affects many children across the globe. I would like to ask you to provide me with information on what the situation regarding statelessness is in [your country, area, continent etc] and what the parliament/city council do to address the issue.

International law defines a “stateless person” as someone who is not considered as a national or a citizen by any State. Worldwide, an estimated 15 million people are stateless. This means that, [Explain in your own words what statelessness is and what impact statelessness can have on a person's life].

I would thus like to know the situation in [your country, area, continent etc]. What are the most crucial statelessness/nationality matters in [your country etc.]? For instance, how many stateless persons live in [your country etc.]? Why are they stateless? Are there specific communities affected by statelessness in [your country etc.]?

[Request the Member of Parliament to explain how the government is addressing the issue and explain the urgent need to resolve statelessness]

[Politely ask the Member of Parliament if he or she can respond to your request and handle this issue with care and a great sense of responsibility]

Yours Sincerely,

[Your name]

## APPENDIX VIII: Greg Constantine's photos

### 1. Côte d'Ivoire





**4. Dominican Republic**



**5. Kuwait**



**6. Malaysia**



**7. Serbia**



## **APPENDIX IX: Greg Constantine's letter**

I remember travelling to the Ivory Coast; it was early 2010. I travelled all around that amazing country, meeting with stateless people who struggled every day. Most were born in the Ivory Coast, but were not recognised as citizens. And with that, they were denied documents which paralysed them, preventing them from being able to move forward with their lives, find jobs, education and a sense of belonging to this country they called home. Toward the end of my time in the Ivory Coast, I visited an orphanage in Abidjan. The orphanage was home to many children who had been given away at birth, some because they had a disability, or orphaned because their parents had passed away. At the time, the laws in the Ivory Coast did not provide nationality to children who were 'foundlings': children who could not provide evidence to establish who their parents were. As a result, the child would travel through life stateless.

One of these children was eleven years old. He had lived in the orphanage all his life. I remember talking briefly with him and when I took his photograph, he said something to me in French. I don't speak or understand French. I assumed he said something about me taking his photograph. But the translator told me the young boy had said, "You see me."

It was an incredibly powerful moment. One that I will never forget. In so many ways, children are the most silent and invisible victims of statelessness. And without a doubt, children have the most to lose by statelessness as well. They represent futures denied. Potential denied. A wealth of amazing contributions to society denied.

Stateless children must rely on others for their voice, and this includes other children. Other children who know what it is like to go to school, enjoy their studies and discover the excitement that comes from learning and having an education. Other children who also have dreams but live day to day with the opportunity to make those dreams come true. Other children, regardless of where they are in the world, who believe it is important to say "All children deserve a birth certificate. All children deserve the right to citizenship."

Adults have a crucial role to play too. Adults who recognise the importance of children receiving every opportunity life can give them, so they may do better than we have.

All children deserve a future.

"We see you!"

*By Greg Constantine*

*First published in the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion report "The World's Stateless: Children" in 2017 (available at: <http://children.worldsstateless.org/random-pages/we-see-you.html>)*

## APPENDIX X: News articles on statelessness

### Article A. Living in a sea of trash: Sabah's stateless children face bleak future

By AMIR YUSOF

Tuesday, 28 May 2019

These stateless Bajau Laut children cannot go to a public school or find a job.

SANDAKAN, Sabah: On most afternoons, Hassan Suhidin and his younger brother, Khairul, would climb down the rickety wooden planks of their village into the rancid shallow waters underneath.

The coastal areas surrounding the island, Pulau Berhala, were covered in garbage, animal carcasses and human waste, due to the absence of a waste management system. Seemingly oblivious to the murky waters, the brothers would tread around barefooted collecting plastic bottles, wooden planks or metal sheets – anything that could potentially be sold for pocket money.



Hassan Suhidin and his younger brother, Khairul, collect plastic, wood and metal pieces along the beach below their home. (Photo: Amir Yusof)



Farm animals owned by the Bajau Laut community are also impacted by the trash situation in Kampung Berhala. (Photo: Amir Yusof)

“We never really got used to the smell, but we don’t have a choice,” said Hassan, 12.

“What do we do with them? We keep them and in time of need when we have no more food, we’ll sell them and use the money,” he added.

The pair are among hundreds of stateless children on Pulau Berhala forced to grow up amid harsh living conditions. The island, located about 10km off the coast of Sandakan, is home to about 5,000 people. It is not clear how many among them are Malaysian citizens.

In the recent Sandakan by-election, just over 300 people cast their votes.

The ethnic Bajau Laut people, or sea gypsies fled to Sabah in the 1970s to escape the war between the Philippine government and the independent movement by the Moro National Liberation Front, resettling in many parts of the state such as Lahad Datu, Semporna and Sandakan.

In the eyes of the Malaysian government, they do not exist.

## A MOTHER'S TEARS

Like their parents or grandparents, the offspring of these migrants have no legal status to work, live, marry or buy a house on Sabah land. And for Khairul and Hassan's mother, who only wanted to be known as Asmida, she is constantly reminded that she cannot give her children a better future. This for her, is a source of regret.



Ms Asmida holding her daughter Bulan outside their home on Pulau Berhala. Bulan's friends regularly visit her house to play with her toys. (Photo: Amir Yusof)

Ms Asmida's husband, Mr Suhidin, works as a fisherman and he earns around RM500 (US\$119.28) a month, which is less than half the minimum wage of RM1,100 set by the government. Her two sons spend their afternoons collecting waste to be sold in Sandakan in case the family's food situation gets desperate.

"I never wanted them to be rubbish collectors. I wanted them to go to school, get a good job in the city and live in proper houses," she said, holding her youngest daughter Bulan in her lap.

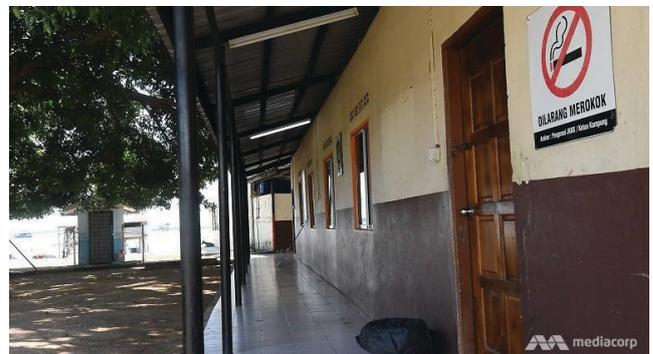
Bulan spends her time playing with makeshift toys, cobbled together by plastic bottle caps and discarded cigarette butts her brothers have brought home.

"For Bulan, I want her to be a doctor. But I can't even promise that I will send her to a proper school. Have I failed her as a mother?" added the 30-year-old as she struggled to hold back tears.

## PULAU BERHALA'S ONLY SCHOOL: TWO TEACHERS, 236 STUDENTS

In two years' time, Bulan will attend the village's only educational institution, Sekolah 3M. The school was set up by the Malaysian military, which has a strategic base at the island to patrol the waters and protect Sabah from militants coming from southern Philippines.

The school aims to equip stateless children with the basic educational skills of reading, writing and counting, but it does not offer its students the opportunity to take national examinations or to graduate with any certificate that will help them apply for a job.



This small building accommodates more than 200 students from the age of four to 17 on weekday mornings. (Photo: Amir Yusof)



Sergeant Muhd Amran Jaafar has taught the children at Pulau Berhala's 3M school for five years. He was trained as a soldier but has now become a full-time teacher. (Photo: Amir Yusof)

The school, built in 2010, is attended by students aged four to 17, and is located next to the Pulau Berhala army camp.

One of the school's two teachers is Sergeant Muhd Amran Jaafar, who told CNA that his objective was to give the village children just a rudimentary level of education.

“We only teach the basic subjects: the Malay language, maths, Islamic studies. We do teach a bit of English, but just how to read basic words and count. We do not have the resources to do any more than that,” said Mr Amran.

He explained that the ratio of teachers to students was too high, and that it was unrealistic for the school to meet the needs of every single child. “There are 236 students here and just two teachers. The other soldiers have their own military responsibilities so it’s just us two. But we do our best,” he said.

Sergeant Amran, who has been teaching at the school full-time since 2013, said he realised that his students do not have “bright futures”, as compared to other students with citizenship who travel from the island to the mainland to attend classes. However, he noted that many of his students are able to apply some of the skills they learn in school in everyday life.

“Their future is not bright, and I am also resigned to the fact that this is the situation. We help them on humanitarian grounds, and I’m proud to see them growing up to be responsible adults,” he said.

When they reach the age of 18, Sergeant Amran said that many of them head to Sandakan to work illegally. Their citizenship status does not allow them to officially hold a job, but they are an important part of Sandakan’s economy, working in industries such as tourism, construction and fishing.

### **“WE MUST NOT LET THEM ENTER SABAH”: CHIEF MINISTER**

The trend of undocumented migrants working and living illegally on Sabah soil was a hot button issue during the Sandakan by-election held earlier this month.

During his campaign speech in support of Democratic Action Party (DAP) candidate Vivian Wong, Sabah Chief Minister Shafie Apdal said that the state government must not allow any more migrants from the Philippines to enter illegally and live on Sabah soil.

“We must make sure they are kept away from the border, and not let what happened in the 1970s repeat itself. If they come here and live, life will be difficult for all of us,” he said to loud cheers.

Mr Shafie also joked that he might take a leaf out of US President Donald Trump’s book and build a huge metal gate at the border between the two countries. “That’s going to be expensive, to build such a gate,” he said, drawing laughter from the crowd. “But we must cordon them (off) and not allow them to enter Sabah,” he added.

Some residents of Pulau Berhala told CNA that they feel unwelcome when they visit the mainland to buy supplies.

Ms Salbiah Gapur, who goes to Sandakan’s public market with her infant daughter to buy groceries regularly, recalled how they have been insulted by the locals when they visit Sandakan.

The pair make the 20-minute journey in a crammed passenger boat twice a week. Each time they travel, Ms Salbiah holds her daughter’s head near a window for ventilation as the boat’s exhaust fumes fill the passenger cabin. But her journey typically does not improve when she reaches the mainland.

“(The locals) can easily tell that we are Bajau Laut people, from the way we dress and talk,” she said. “And they don’t hide (their disdain). They call us outsiders and illegal immigrants. My daughter has not learnt to talk and she has already been subjected to such abuse,” said the 26-year-old.



Ms Salbiah and her infant daughter on a passenger boat travelling from Sandakan to her home in Pulau Berhala. (Photo: Amir Yusof)

## RESIDENTS TURN TO NEW MP

Those on Pulau Berhala hope the authorities can do more to improve their living conditions.

Ms Syamsiah Kamal, who is mother to six young children said the government should resolve the trash problem and the lack of basic electricity for residents. “We don’t have any trash system. The sea is our garbage dump, and that’s not hygienic for us and the animals we own,” she added.



The village do not have a garbage disposal system for its 5,000 residents. (Photo: Amir Yusof)

Furthermore, the lack of electricity supply to the island means that she has to cook in a makeshift kitchen outside her wooden hut. The small space has beach sand on the floor and a small zinc roof.

When CNA visited the kitchen, Ms Syamsiah was boiling flour to make porridge for dinner on her wooden stove. But the black soot emanating from the stove left her two children, Naqib and Jumaat, who were playing marbles outside, coughing wildly.

“If I don’t cook this food, they’ll starve. But when I cook, it’s also not a healthy situation with the smoke all over the place,” she said.

“But I’m confident that the Sabah government will help us, if god wills it. We are not citizens, but we are still part of the community after all,” added Ms Syamsiah.



Ms Vivian Wong’s campaign posters were plastered across Pulau Berhala during the by-election campaign. (Photo: Amir Yusof)

Sergeant Amran pointed out that the army and non-profit organisations would sometimes organise mass beach clean-up events to help clear up the waste on the coasts of Pulau Berhala. But according to Ms Syamsiah, the problem is that many of the villagers are not educated on how to put aside their trash responsibly, and there is no system for any official to collect the trash and dispose of them properly.

“My children are sick often and every month I have to take them to the clinic on the mainland to see the doctor. I think it’s because of the trash situation,” she said.



Ms Syamsiah cooking her children’s dinner. (Photo: Amir Yusof)

Ms Syamsiah also said she is glad that Ms Wong of DAP won the by-election and is optimistic that more educational facilities will be developed on the island. On her part, Ms Wong told CNA that she wants to build a community centre on Pulau Berhala, even though not everyone is a Malaysian there.

The centre will host classes to teach the children basic school subjects, moral values, as well as life skills, such as how to dispose trash responsibly, said the new lawmaker.

“I do understand that (extending help to the Bajau Laut community) is a very sensitive topic and it is not fair for me to give equal rights to them as the Sabahans who are citizens,” said Ms Wong, who is a former teacher.

“But from a humanitarian point of view, I think they should be given the minimum level of education, so that we don’t form a generation of children that resort to crime like stealing to earn a living in Sandakan.”

Source: CNA/am(tx)

## Article B. Stateless kids causing a headache for Sabah authorities

By MUGUNTAN VANAR

Sunday, 09 Feb 2020

KOTA KINABALU: A group of sea gypsies or Pelahu children are posing a “headache” for authorities as they beg and mess around with the facilities around the city centre. The children, numbering about 30, have been rounded up and lectured about their activities but to no avail as some of their parents were also going about begging along the streets with authorities having little power or laws to act.



Children of sea gypsies taking a dip at Kota Kinabalu’s Gaya Street fountain that triggered a social media storm

Commenting on recent viral photographs and video of the children bathing at a water fountain at the city’s popular Gaya Street, Kota Kinabalu city mayor Datuk Nordin Siman said that the children have been rounded up many times in the past and were given counselling over their act.

“Their parents were also called in and told to watch their children’s activities but they just get back to their begging after awhile,” he said when contacted on Sunday (Feb 9).

It is understood that neither the state Welfare Department nor the Immigration Department can provide assistance or deport them as they are stateless.

“We are in a dilemma with handling the problem.

“They are not involved in crime or any criminal intimidation. The problem is more of a nuisance and gives our city a bad image. We are having a problem keeping them from misbehaving on our streets,” he said.

“We have recorded the details of the children. They are about 30 of them who are loitering the streets, but it could be more,” he added.

He said operations to round up the children were done regularly but the cycle of “catch and then release” was not solving the problem. Nordin said that the sea gypsy population has been slowly growing around the city since 2003 when state authorities acted against two families living under a bridge in Sembulan here. They were sent back to the state’s east coast.

“We believe it is the same families and their number has been growing over time,” he said, adding that most of them now lived in stilt houses at the Sembulan water village near town or Kg Pondo in Pulau Gaya off the city.

Nordin said based on a 2019 census, the city identified 399 adult Pelahus and 740 children in the city. In the latest viral video of the children jumping into the fountain, he said they were there for three minutes and when city enforcement arrived, they had fled. Pelahus are a group of sea nomads who have been plying the Sulu Sea between Sabah and the southern Philippines.

Some hold Malaysian identification documents while others only have letters to state that they belong to the Pelahu community.

## Article C. Thousands find themselves stateless in the Dominican Republic

By WHITNEY PHILLIPS (Cronkite Borderlands Initiative)

### SANTO DOMINGO, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

While politicians in at least 14 states are arguing the merits of birthright citizenship in the U.S., this country is already ruling out citizenship for thousands of people.

Over the past seven years, the Dominican government has re-written its Constitution, re-interpreted old laws and passed new ones, effectively eliminating birthright citizenship. Today, a child born in the Dominican Republic is no longer automatically a citizen; citizenship goes only to those who can prove they have at least one documented parent.

Further, vigorous enforcement of the new rules means that hundreds of thousands of people, mostly of Haitian descent, are finding it increasingly difficult to get access to their birth certificates, which are required to get married, obtain a high school diploma, start a business, get a driver's license or passport or even sign up for a phone plan. It is also needed to get a cédula, the national identity card that is essential for voting and conducting a licensed business activity such as banking.

Without proper documentation, these residents have no legal status in the Dominican Republic, and many who have been in this country for years are unable to prove they are legal citizens of Haiti, either.

They are, in effect, stateless – citizens of no country.

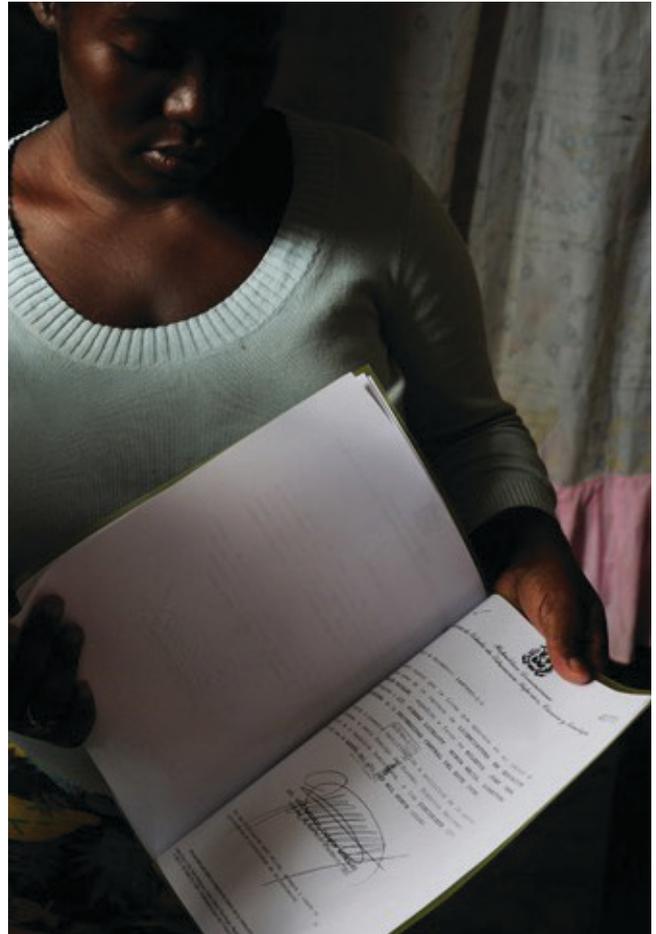
Cristobal Rodríguez, a Dominican human rights attorney and law professor, puts it another way: “Here a civil genocide is being committed,” he said.

### NO FUTURE

Miledis Juan looks down at her 1-year-old son Henry, his nose running and eyes swollen from a cold. His arms stretch upward, and Juan picks him up.

She and her son were both born in this country, and that, Juan says, gives them every right to be Dominican citizens. But the Dominican government has another view of the matter, and that leaves Juan worried about her son's future and her own.

“He practically doesn't exist,” she said. “Without documents you are nobody.”



Miledis Juan, a 25-year-old Dominican woman with a teaching degree, cannot find work as a teacher because she was denied access to her birth certificate. Photo by Brandon Quester



Miledis Juan lives with her husband, Henry Claude Joseph, and 1-year-old son, Henry Alberto, who was also denied a birth certificate. Photo by Brandon Quester

Dominican officials say the country's laws were never meant to grant birthright citizenship to the children or descendants of illegal immigrants. And they argue against the term "stateless" as applied to those of Haitian descent born in the Dominican Republic.

José Ángel Aquino, a magistrate for the country's civil registry, the Junta Central Electoral, said Haitian descendants can go back to Haiti and obtain citizenship as long as they can prove their parents are Haitian.

"Because of this, in the case of the Haitians, for us, you can't speak of the 'stateless,'" Aquino said in Spanish. "These Haitian citizens always have the possibility of declaring themselves in their consulate...or simply in Haiti."

But for many Haitian immigrants, like Juan, the situation is more complex.

Born in December 1985 when laws and attitudes were different, Juan was granted a Dominican birth certificate and a national identification card. She has no papers proving she is from Haiti, and to become a naturalized Haitian citizen, she would have to go through a five-year application process, said Liliana Gamboa, a project director for the Open Society Justice Initiative in Santo Domingo.

Besides, Juan doesn't want Haitian citizenship; she has never lived in the country. "I know that Haiti exists because there is a map that I can see where it is, but I actually have no connections with it," she said.

Her life is in Batey Esperanza, a poor, mostly Haitian-Dominican community just outside the nation's capital, Santo Domingo, where she works long days at an embroidery machine in a free-trade zone.

Although she went to college to become a teacher, she is unable to get a teaching job because she can't get a new copy of her birth certificate. The country's civil registries retain every citizen's original birth certificate and issue duplicates upon request. Official duplicates are necessary for every legal act, from applying to a university and purchasing property to obtaining a marriage license and securing most jobs. Each duplicate can be used for only one purpose and expires in a few months.



Henry Claude Joseph holds his son at home in Batey Esperanza. Photo by Brandon Quester

Juan said that when she went to the civil registry, she was told her she should never have been registered as a Dominican citizen because her parents came without documents from Haiti.

"Practically, my hands are tied," she said. "There's nothing I can do because without that birth certificate, I'm paralyzed."

She also needs her birth certificate to get Henry one of his own. Without it, he cannot access public health services or attend school past the eighth grade.

"My biggest fear is that he's in the country without documents," Juan said. "He is nobody in the country."

## **CHANGING THE GROUND RULES**

Before birthright citizenship was abolished, the Dominican Constitution stated that anyone born in the country was a citizen, with the exception of children born to people “in transit,” a term generally interpreted to mean those in the country fewer than 10 days. The first of the changes passed in 2004 redefined “in transit” to mean those in the country illegally. A year later, the Dominican Supreme Court upheld the 2004 law as constitutional.

Six years later, the Dominican government revised its Constitution to further limit citizenship. Since Jan. 26, 2010, citizens must prove they have at least one parent of Dominican nationality to be recognized. At the same time, the Junta Central Electoral, which oversees the civil registries, issued an order known as Circular 17, which directs government employees not to give duplicates of birth certificates and other identity documents if they have any reason to believe the person should not have Dominican citizenship.

According to Gamboa, this means the JCE “decides ...if you are worthy of your documentation” and has led to the targeting of people with French-sounding last names and dark skin.

That’s what Modesta Michel believes happened to her. Michel applied for her national ID card when she turned 18 in 2007. Cédulas are issued at age 18 and must be renewed every six years or when the government issues a new version. At first, all went well. She had an approved copy of her birth certificate, and the civil registry office approved her cédula, giving her a receipt that verified the information that would appear on her identification card. But then she was told that she would not get the official, laminated card after all because her parents immigrated from Haiti, she said. And shortly after, when she needed a copy of her birth certificate to take the national test for a high school diploma, that, too, was denied, she said.

“Every year goes by, and I sometimes feel like hope is going away, but I have to trust God that eventually this will get solved because studying is the only way that I can actually move forward in life,” Michel said through a translator. “It’s the only option that I have.”

## **MOUNTING CHALLENGES**

[...] The Open Society Justice Initiative and other human rights organizations have begun fighting the changes in court.

[...] More recently, they’ve taken up the case of Emildo Bueno. Born in the Dominican in 1975, he had several citizenship documents, including a birth certificate and passport. Even so, in 2007 when Bueno went to obtain a copy of his birth certificate for a visa to join his wife in the U.S., he was turned down because his parents were Haitian nationals.

With Rodríguez, the Dominican human rights attorney, representing him, Bueno took his case to a Dominican national court in 2008, claiming a violation of his basic human right to nationality. The case was unsuccessful.

“In spite of all evidence and proof and the fact that legally I was good, the judge took a decision against me,” Bueno said in Spanish.

He submitted an appeal to the Dominican Supreme Court in 2009, but the court has yet to rule. Meanwhile, Francisco Quintana, a deputy program director and litigator for the Center for Justice and International Law, has submitted the case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Gamboa said a favorable ruling from the international could draw attention to the problem and pressure the Dominican government into changing its policies.

“At the end of the day, it will be political pressure that will bring the result we expect, which is the recognition of nationality of people of Haitian descent,” she said.

[...] Though the political situation for Haitian immigrants and their children has been bleak, there may be a glimmer of hope on the horizon. Aquino said that he supports a regularization program for Haitian workers. In late July another JCE magistrate, Eddy Olivares, said in a television interview that the children of Haitian immigrants should be given identity papers — especially those that came to the Dominican Republic under labor agreements with Haiti. He further stated that the Dominican Republic's immigration agency, not the JCE, has the authority to make decisions on the validity of identity documents and the JCE, therefore, should not be invalidating documents because a person's parents are immigrants. In the end, however, a major political and legislative shift would have to occur, throughout the Dominican government, to turn the tide against immigrant rights.

## **THEIR FUTURE**

There isn't much Juan, Michel or Bueno can do while citizenship continues to be redefined in the country of their birth.

Juan goes to work each day at the clothing factory, although she would much rather be teaching.

Bueno made it to the U.S. after finally obtaining his visa. He works at a security company in Florida while his case for Dominican citizenship is being appealed. He has temporary residence in the U.S., but has no official citizenship anywhere.

Bueno spoke for them all when he said, "We have no country now."

Along with thousands of others, they hope they are not wrong when they call themselves Dominican.

## Article D. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people trapped in stateless limbo

By DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS

Tuesday, 20 August 2019

‘Two years after a campaign of targeted violence in Myanmar, little has changed for those uprooted.’

Sitting in a teashop in Kutupalong, the massive refugee megacamp in Bangladesh where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people have settled after fleeing targeted violence in neighboring Myanmar, Bibi Jan tugs on her sleeve. She’s covering up scars inflicted in August 2017, during the events that forced her to flee her homeland: she was stabbed, her two brothers were killed, and her village was razed to the ground.

The Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority from Myanmar’s Rakhine state, have been subject to decades of persecution and state exclusion. Two years ago, starting on August 25, 2017, news of Myanmar’s campaign of targeted violence against the Rohingya dominated the headlines. Since then, little progress has been made to fully address the Rohingya refugee crisis, including issues regarding the lack of legal status for those displaced in the region and the underlying causes of discrimination against the community in Myanmar.

To date no meaningful solutions have been offered to the Rohingya people, who have been pushed to the margins of society in virtually all of the countries to which they have fled. In Bangladesh, more than 912,000 Rohingya still live in the same basic bamboo structures as when they first arrived. They face travel and work restrictions, and remain wholly reliant on humanitarian aid.



Bangladesh 2017 © Pablo Tosco



Bangladesh 2019 © Dalila Mahdawi/MSF

Many of the illnesses Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) teams treat at our clinics in Cox’s Bazar are a result of the poor living conditions that the Rohingya endure, with poor access to clean latrines and water. We have provided more than 1.3 million medical consultations from August 2017 to June 2019, and continue to treat tens of thousands of patients a month.

With Rohingya children unable to access formal education, future generations are deprived of an opportunity to improve their situation. “I want to send my children to school, but I don’t have enough money and we can’t leave the camp. It’s difficult to plan a future for our children,” says Bibi Jan. “If we worked, we wouldn’t need rations. We could survive on our own.”

The situation facing Rohingya people who are still in Myanmar is similarly bleak. In 1982, a citizenship law rendered the Rohingya effectively stateless, and in recent years they have been stripped of even more of their rights, ranging from civic inclusion to education, marriage, and family planning rights to freedom of movement and access to health care.



Bangladesh 2019 © Dalila Mahdawi/MSF

do anything more. We hold our frustration inside because we cannot speak out—there are no opportunities for that. We cannot even travel to the next township, so people keep everything inside, bottled up.”

An estimated 550,000 to 600,000 Rohingya are still living across Rakhine state. Their already difficult lives have become harder as they and other communities suffer the consequences of a worsening conflict between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army, an ethnic Rakhine armed group.

“We just want our freedom, to have our own livelihoods, and to sleep at night without worrying,” says Suleiman. “The longyi [cloth] is a symbol of Myanmar, and all the ethnicities of Myanmar have their own pattern, but not us. We wear the longyi, but we have no pattern. We own nothing. I wish people could look at us and see us for who we are. I just want people to know who the Rohingya are.”

## MALAYSIA: PUSHED INTO THE SHADOWS



Iman Hussein in Penang. For the past 10 weeks, his employer hasn't paid him but he continues to work because he lives in a small shelter on the site. Without that shelter, he would be homeless. Malaysia 2019 © Arnaud Finistre

In 2012 violence between the Rohingya and Rakhine communities left entire villages razed. Since then, some 128,000 Rohingya and Kaman Muslims in central Rakhine have lived in overcrowded and squalid displacement camps. Denied both jobs and freedom of movement, as well as access to basic services, they too rely entirely on humanitarian assistance.

“There aren't any real opportunities for employment here; there are hardly any fish to catch either,” says Suleiman, a Rohingya man living in Nget Chaung, home to some 9,000 people. “Because there's so little trade, we can't buy the things we want. People here are sad. They are frustrated that they can't go anywhere or



A young man looks on at the outskirts of Ah Nauk Ye camp. Myanmar 2019 © Scott Hamilton

Rohingya people have also been fleeing to Malaysia over the past 30 years. But those who make the journey end up marginalized and without legal status. Unable to work legally, they often disappear into Malaysia's urban black market economy, where they are vulnerable to exploitation, debt bondage, and hazardous jobs. Walking down the street or even seeking medical care can result in refugees being extorted or sent to detention centers.

Iman Hussein, 22, fled Rakhine in 2015, spending time in Thailand before arriving in Penang, Malaysia. Like many refugees, he has eked out a living by working in Penang's booming construction industry. His employer hasn't paid him his salary for the past 10 weeks, but Hussein says he has no choice but to keep working as he lives on-site and would be destitute if he left.

“Over the past two years, very little real effort has been made to address the underlying causes of discrimination the Rohingya face and enable them to return home safely,” says Benoit de Gryse, MSF operations manager for Myanmar and Malaysia. “If the Rohingya are to have any chance of a better future, the international community must redouble diplomatic efforts with Myanmar and champion greater legal recognition for an incredibly disempowered group.”

## Article E. I found a country, but lost my brother - Stateless activist

By EMMA BATHA (Thomson Reuters Foundation)  
Monday, 7 October 2019

‘For most people a passport is a travel document, but for me it means everything. It means I exist. It’s finally a sign I belong somewhere.’

As a teenager growing up in Lebanon Maha Mamo lived in constant terror of checkpoints, but her only crime was to be born stateless. With no documents to prove who she was, Mamo feared she could be arrested and locked up indefinitely.

Like other stateless people, she was deprived of basic rights most people take for granted. Everything from going to school or getting a job to even enjoying a night out with friends was fraught with difficulties.



Stateless activist Maha Mamo is photographed after receiving Brazilian citizenship on October 4, 2018, at an event hosted by the UNHCR in Geneva. UNHCR/Susan Hopper

On Monday, Mamo will tell her story to film star Cate Blanchett at the opening of a major intergovernmental meeting on statelessness in Geneva.

Charismatic, down-to-earth and fluent in five languages, Mamo has become a powerful voice in #Ibelong, a campaign to eradicate statelessness which is estimated to affect about 10 million people worldwide.

“For most people a passport is a travel document, but for me it means everything,” said Mamo, who became a Brazilian national last year and now speaks at international events draped in a Brazilian flag.

“It means I exist. It’s finally a sign I belong somewhere.”

### MASSIVE IMPACT

Mamo’s fate was sealed before she was born when her Christian father and Muslim mother fell in love in Syria. Interfaith marriages were banned so they eloped to neighbouring Lebanon where she, her sister Souad and brother Eddy were born.

“You can only be Lebanese if your father is Lebanese, and we couldn’t be Syrian because our parents’ marriage was illegal, so we grew up stateless,” she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“It has had a massive impact all my life. I had many challenges every day. I was afraid of every single thing.” Mamo was rejected by many schools before eventually being accepted by an Armenian school which took pity on the family.



Activist Maha Mamo (R), who spent 30 years as a stateless person, is pictured with her brother Eddy and sister Souad. Photo supplied by Maha Mamo

A talented basketball player, she was scouted by professional coaches who believed she had potential to play on the national team - until they realised she had no documents.

“That was when my world came crashing down,” she said. “This was the first moment when the deprivations really hit home. But as a teenager I didn’t yet understand how big my problem was.”

Despite good school grades, her applications to study medicine at university were also rejected. Health care was another obstacle. To get urgent hospital treatment for a severe allergy Mamo was forced to pretend to be her best friend. With no papers, even the most mundane things became a logistical nightmare.

“There are simple things you would never imagine that are so impossible; buying a sim card, getting a loan, having a library card or even going to a club to dance with your friends or celebrate a birthday,” she said.

“If they ask for ID you have to give up and go home.”

In Lebanon, there was the added danger posed by checkpoints.

“If the police stop you then you are going to jail just because you don’t have documents,” she said.

“Every time I saw one I had to run the other way just because my existence itself was illegal.”

## **NEW BEGINNING**

Desperate for a solution to her predicament, Mamo sent her story to presidents, ministers and any organisation she thought might be able to help - and was met with a wall of silence. But in 2014 Brazil offered to take Mamo and her siblings under a new humanitarian visa programme it had launched to help Syrians fleeing war.

“I went to Brazil not as a stateless person, but as a refugee. I only knew two things about Brazil - the football and the carnival,” said Mamo, now 31 and fluent in Portuguese. Her arrival in Brazil coincided with the launch of the United Nations’ #Ibelong campaign aimed at ending statelessness in a decade. “For me, my brother and sister that was the hope. In 10 years we would have the chance to be a person, a human being,” said Mamo.

But she did not have to wait that long. In 2017, Brazil changed its law to recognise stateless people and provide a route to naturalisation. Last year Mamo and her sister became the first stateless people in Brazil to be granted citizenship. Mamo, who is writing a book about her life, recalls vividly the moment when she was presented with her Brazilian passport - ending 30 years in limbo.

“I started shaking and crying,” she said. “I did not believe what was happening, that this was my moment when I’m born again and my life would totally change.”

However, the ceremony was bittersweet because her brother could not share in her joy. Just weeks after being granted asylum in Brazil, Eddy had been killed in a street robbery.

“I couldn’t make his dream come true, I couldn’t make him a citizen of this world,” said Mamo. “He died a stateless person.”