

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

Or 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 had always felt the same as my friends until the day when I had to fill up my form for the School Leaving Certificate's board exam... all my friend's forms were accepted. Mine was not."

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? 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 have lost their citizenship or are themselves stateless.

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 in honour of their talents and bravery.

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