

Nowhere People: The Global Face of Statelessness



Today (14 November) marks the opening at the Royal Albert Hall of *Nowhere People: The Global Face of Statelessness*, an exhibition by award-winning photographer Greg Constantine. The exhibition has been shown in New York, Washington, Geneva and Madrid and arrives in London before travelling on to Tokyo.

Nationality might seem like a universal birthright, but an estimated 12 million people are living without it. These stateless people have no legal identity, are citizens of no country and are some of the most vulnerable and invisible people in the world.

Statelessness is a massive problem that occurs for a variety of reasons, including the conflict of nationality laws between countries and the failure to include all residents as citizens when a state becomes independent. Discrimination is also a root cause. Exclusionary nationality laws and policies have had a disproportionate impact on ethnic, linguistic and religious minority groups. Though many states now ensure gender equality, a number of states maintain laws which allow only men to confer nationality on their children.

Without nationality, stateless people are often unable to enjoy a wide range of rights and are prevented from fully participating in society. Many stateless people are unable to register the birth of a child, go to school, work legally, travel freely, own property or obtain vital identity documents or passports. Moreover, statelessness frequently leaves a person without a sense of identity and with little or no voice.

As a result, statelessness can be harmful and in many cases devastating to the lives of the individuals and communities concerned. Stateless people are vulnerable to arbitrary treatment and crimes like human trafficking. Their marginalization can create tensions in society and lead to instability at the international level, including, in extreme cases, unrest, conflict and forced displacement.

Over the past five years, photographer Greg Constantine has been working to ring to light the stories of stateless people around the world and give a human face to this global issue. *Nowhere People* reveals the impact of statelessness on people and communities who find themselves excluded from society by forces beyond their control. The project serves as a reminder of the existence of the millions of stateless people who are hidden and forgotten around the world.

But statelessness can be prevented and resolved, often through simple, low-cost action. UNHCR works to address statelessness by assisting governments to ensure that laws and procedures prevent statelessness from occurring and allow stateless people to acquire a nationality. Under its statelessness mandate, UNHCR is advising stateless people on their rights and how to access procedures. On 22 November, UNHCR and Asylum Aid will launch a joint report, *Mapping Statelessness in the UK*, the first research of its kind to ascertain the extent of the problem and the dire human consequences for stateless people in the UK.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of one of the two international treaties that address statelessness, the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, *Nowhere People* serves as a reminder of why it is urgent to resolve this global problem.

Roland Schilling, UNHCR Representative to the UK, said:

“It is not acceptable for any person to be excluded from society to such an extent that they are denied access to education, employment, housing and even identity documents, because no country in the world feels responsible for them. Although statelessness is a global problem, it appears in the UK as well. We call upon the UK government to address the challenge of statelessness and to ensure that the human rights of stateless persons on UK territory are not infringed.”

Notes for editors:

- A selection of images from *Nowhere People* can be viewed here: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c25d-page3.html>
- *Nowhere People* will be shown at the Royal Albert Hall from 14 November to 5 December, for ticket-holders only. The exhibition is open to the public and can be view free of charge on
Tuesday 22 November, 11am - 3pm
Saturday 26 November, 11am – 4pm
Sunday 27 November, 11am – 4pm
- High resolution images from the *Nowhere People* exhibition can be requested from Greg Constantine at grcmendel@hotmail.com
- For further information please contact Laura Padoan: padoan@unhcr.org 020 7759 8092