

ESCAP 2nd Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

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Talking Points for UNHCR RBAP

Session 7 (Senior Officials): The relationship between civil registration, identity management and vital statistics, and their role in ensuring legal identity in Asia and the Pacific: 18 November 2021, 14:00 – 16:00 (BKK time)

Mr. Matthias Reuss, Senior Statelessness Officer

- Thank you, chair, for giving me the floor. Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

- **Civil registration** is the basis for legal identity documentation, and **identity papers** are the basis for **the full realization of human rights**. This holds true for everybody. It equally applies to persons falling within UNHCR's international protection mandate.

- Identity papers facilitate access to health, education, and livelihoods. They may prevent human trafficking, the exploitation of children, and child marriage. Yet for persons under UNHCR's protection mandate, identity papers have an additional dimension: They facilitate **access to solutions**.

- At an earlier session, I have already spoken about the link between civil registration, legal identity and the **access to durable solutions for refugees**. Today I would like to add some remarks on **legal identity and access to nationality**.

- In practice, the realization of everyone's **individual human right to a nationality**, as enshrined in Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, often fails due to the lack of proof. First and foremost, this means a lack of birth certificates and legal identity documentation. Birth certificates usually indicate a person's place of birth,

parentage, and often the nationality of the parents. **Having a birth certificate significantly reduces the risk of becoming stateless.** Even for stateless persons, acquiring a late birth certificate may be the first step towards the **acquisition of legal identity documentation** and thus create **an opportunity to apply for naturalization.** There is no automatism leading from birth certificates to nationality. But making civil registration and identity management systems accessible for everyone will go a long way in **reducing statelessness among hard-to-reach and vulnerable population groups.**

- Reflecting on the region's way forward, let me share with you the experience of the partnership between the **ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Women and Children and UNHCR.** Over many years, both cooperated to promote "inclusion and sustainable development in building the ASEAN Community through ensuring the recognition of the legal identity of all women and children". The **joint activities focused on legal identity and birth registration.** In 2020, the ACWC launched the study on "Legal Identity of All Women and Children in ASEAN, A Regional Synthesis". I am pleased to say that the outcomes of the study are now being translated into concrete activities in numerous ASEAN Member States, in particular in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.
- Thank you for your attention.