



## 2024 World Conference on Statelessness: Preliminary Synthesis Report

*Simply put, WCS was easily the best conference I have participated in across topic, format and people, over the course of my professional life. I attest to being in other settings that were as inspiring; participating in other sessions as informative, intellectually stimulating and rigorous; and, in more limited number, being privy to other arenas that were as electric. The WCS surpassed these in scale, intensity, sustenance and coherence of purpose.*

Prof. Joshua Castellino  
 Executive Co-Director, Minority Rights Group International  
 & Professor of International & Comparative Law, University of Derby, UK

The [World Conference on Statelessness](#) (WCS) was convened at [Taylor’s University](#) Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from 26 to 29 February 2024. It was organised by the [Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion](#) (global), [Nationality for All](#) (Asia-Pacific), [Development of Human Resources for Rural Areas \(Malaysia\)](#) and [Family Frontiers \(Malaysia\)](#), and supported by the [Human Rights Commission of Malaysia](#) (SUHAKAM).

This short, preliminary synthesis report provides an overview of the conference. A more in-depth report will follow.

### Introduction

The Conference brought together around **450 participants** with lived and learned experience of statelessness, from over 50 countries and all regions of the world, to exchange knowledge, perspectives, ideas and skills. Further, more than 100 people joined hybrid sessions via a livestream option.

The Conference prioritised centring those with lived experience of statelessness. While the organisers didn’t require participants to divulge their status in this regard, around 30% of those who responded to an anonymous voluntary survey at the opening session, indicated they had lived experience of statelessness. This is a significant increase from the 2019 World Conference, at which around 10% of participants had lived experience.



Supported by:



## Conference Opening

The conference was opened by the Professor Barry Winn, Vice Chancellor of Taylor's University.

Opening messages were given by:

Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (via video message)

- Ragunath Kesavan, Deputy Chair of SUHAKAM
- Hai Kyung Jun, Director of the Regional Bureau Asia Pacific of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- Neha Gurung and Aleksejs Ivashuk, Co-Leads of the Global Movement Against Statelessness



Maalini Ramalo, Amal de Chickera, Subin Mulmi and Laura van Waas, all representing the conference organisers, spoke at the opening session. There were performances by acclaimed Malaysian group Hands Percussion, spoken word artist Patricia Low and hip-hop artist Danial Bogers (both of whom are impacted by Malaysia's gender discriminatory nationality laws). There was also a performance of the play 'grief unanswered', based on the experiences of and created by members of the Statelessness Action Group.

Several Malaysian dignitaries attended the conference, including:

- YB (Yang Berhormat/Honorable) Teo Nie Ching, Deputy Minister of Communications in the Government of Malaysia.
- Senator Datuk Seri Zurainah binti Musa
- Hon M. Kula Segaran, Dep. Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law & Institutional Reform).
- Prof. Dato' Noor Aziah Mohd Awal, SUHAKAM Commissioner
- Dr. Farah Nini Dusuki, SUHAKAM Children's Commissioner
- YM (Yang Mulia) Tengku Mohamed Fauzi Bin Tengku Abdul Hamid, SUHAKAM Commissioner
- Dato' Hasnal Rezua Merican, SUHAKAM Commissioner
- Datuk Hajah Mariati Robert, SUHAKAM Commissioner

Participants came from a wide range of backgrounds of lived and learned experience of statelessness, including individual activists and those from civil society, academia, the arts sector and international organisations. International dignitaries included UN Special Rapporteurs, Treaty Body Members, Inter-American Commission and African Union representatives, Human Rights Commissioners of the Philippines and Indonesia, senior UN staff, leaders of international, regional and national organisations, senior academics and celebrated artists.

Also in attendance, from Taylor's University were the following staff members:

- Prof Eddy Chong Siong Choy, Executive Dean, Faculty of Business and Law
- Prof P.T. Thomas, Executive Dean, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences
- Ms Josephine Tan Lian Lei, Campus Director, Taylor's College, Pro-Vice Chancellor International Relations
- Associate Prof Harmahinder Singh Iqbal Singh, Head of School, School of Law and Governance
- Benjamin Loh Yew Hoong, PJSI Impact Lab Director

## Conference Programme

The Conference ran over three and a half days of substantive sessions. The programme focused on the three themes of **SOLIDARITY, KNOWLEDGE** and **CHANGE**, and was consultatively developed to respond to the interests and needs of the field.

The [conference programme](#) (summary agenda [here](#)) comprised a daily opening and closing plenary framed around the theme for that day, and a mixture of panel discussions, workshops, skills labs, and roundtables. There were up to 8 sessions running parallel in any given timeslot, with a total of 74 individual sessions over the whole conference period. Of these, 10 sessions plus all opening and closing plenaries, were broadcast as part of our separately advertised [online programme](#).



The sessions provided a diverse range of spaces for different types of discussions; for example, there were sessions where attendees could present research findings, ask questions to funders, have open-conversations or receive practical information on staying safe as a human rights defender. Many sessions were made more impactful due to moving interventions from the floor, or else powerful artistic performances as part of the ‘Think of Others’ Arts and Culture programme (see below).

The Conference provided a platform for some key milestones for the statelessness field. These included:

- The much-anticipated launch of the [Global Movement Against Statelessness](#)
- The launch of the Statelessness and Dignified Citizenship Coalition - Asia Pacific (SDCC - AP)
- The launch of the online global library and database on statelessness - [StatelessHub](#)
- The launch of a special issue of *Citizenship Studies* on legal identity under insurgencies and unrecognised states
- The launch of a special issue of *Statelessness and Citizenship Review* on early career scholarship on statelessness
- The launch of the edited collection *Statelessness in Asia* (published by Cambridge University Press)
- The announcement of the launch of the Global Statelessness Fund, which will provide resourcing and accompaniment support to stateless-led organisations

## ‘Think of Others’ Arts and Culture Programme

The Arts and Culture programme, titled ‘**Think of Others**’, was an integral component of the conference. Aligned with the broader conference objectives, it aimed to:

- Cultivate empathy and a deeper understanding of statelessness among participants through immersive artistic encounters.
- Create a personal connection between participants and the stories, experiences and activism of stateless individuals.
- Facilitate open and informed discussions about statelessness, its complexities, and potential solutions, using art as a catalyst for dialogue and change.

**Think of Others** was thoughtfully put together by an experienced creative team. It wasn't seen as a value-add to the conference, but as an integral, crucially important part of the programme. The name 'Think of Others' is the title of a typically thought-provoking poem by renowned Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish. The poem, invites the reader to grow, share and transform. As such, it embodies the conference themes of 'knowledge' (in this context, greater awareness of self and others), 'solidarity' (greater empathy for others) and 'change' (applying awareness and empathy with transformative effect).



**Think of Others** was heavily incorporated into the main conference programme and consisted of arts workshops, films screenings, visual arts exhibits, performances of poetry, theatre, music, and dance, immersive experiences and artists speaking on panels. An [Arts Catalogue](#) and [Compilation of Poems](#) was made available to attendees containing information on the **Think of Others** programme.

## Conference logistics and support

The Conference organisers took special care to ensure maximum participation, particularly of those with lived experience of statelessness and representing grass-roots groups around the world, and in Malaysia. A combination of fee waivers, travel and accommodation support was provided to around 200 participants, as a result of a concerted fundraising effort, and a dedicated logistics team.

All conference attendees were provided with physical conference materials, most visibly the conference tote bags, ID badges, and a Malaysian batik design fan. Conference Booths, run by participating organisations, also provided participants with a range of publications and paraphernalia. Participants could also purchase handicrafts, books and other items from stalls run by stateless-led and community-based organisations.

Attendees had use of the conference app provided by Whova. On the app, attendees could set up their profiles, browse event materials, set a personalised schedule, and network with people before or after the conference. Any changes to the agenda, such as new speakers or rooms, could be quickly actioned by the organisers with the changes displayed immediately on the agendas of the attendees.

With the direct messaging and community posting features of the Whova app, attendees were able to share articles and ask questions to the organisers, as well as convene their own meet-ups and social gatherings, including ride sharing from the airport, walking tours by a local stateless Malaysian, and a dinner with a Palestinian family in Kuala Lumpur.

## Support team

A dedicated team of more than 60 people were responsible for the smooth running of the conference. These included the following personnel, who were brought on to provide key services before, during, and after the conference, as well as facilitate the smooth running of the programme.

## ***Safeguarding, Wellbeing, First Aid and Language Support***

We were committed to prioritising the health, safety and wellbeing of participants and made arrangements with a number of specialist providers to offer support.

We brought on consultants to act as part of our **safeguarding** team alongside select staff from the conference organisers. To ensure a safe and inclusive environment for everyone at the 2024 World Conference on Statelessness, the safeguarding team established a Code of Conduct and Safeguarding Policy, which was circulated to attendees as part of the general information in their Conference Pack and outlines our commitment to fostering respect, diversity, and security. It provided information about the safeguarding team and details of the anonymous reporting mechanisms through which participants could report safeguarding concerns discreetly. The safeguarding team were on hand to react immediately to any safeguarding concerns that arose during the conference period.

Minda Psychology Services managed the **wellbeing** component of the conference and were onsite for the duration of the conference, offering a workshop on 'Protecting Wellbeing in the Statelessness Field' and a range of wellness services, including confidential counselling services, decompression / grounding sessions in the agenda, and a wellbeing room accessible throughout the day for moments where attendees might need a quiet space to recharge.

**First Aid** services were provided by a crew from the Malaysian Red Crescent.

**Language support** was provided by volunteers from the Conference Team and our partners and was available to attendees in Spanish, French, and Arabic.

Further information on safeguarding, wellbeing, first aid and language support services, policies and resources offered at the conference, can be found [here](#).

## ***Immigration support***

Given the challenges that many stateless people face when travelling internationally, the conference team recruited two consultants to provide immigration support to international attendees, and in particular our attendees travelling to Malaysia on refugee or stateless travel documents. The consultants worked closely with the conference team in the lead-up to the conference to ensure the necessary visas were obtained on time, reacting quickly to issues raised by attendees. The consultants were also available to be contacted directly by attendees in case they encountered difficulties upon arrival into Malaysia.

## ***Student volunteers***

The 26 student volunteers from Taylor's University were essential to ensuring smooth transitions of attendees between sessions. The volunteers worked in shifts over the four days, assisting with ushering, session support, and answering general enquiries from attendees.