

Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders:

“Raising their voices: human rights defenders
respond to the human rights crisis”

Global Movement Against Statelessness
Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion
7 October 2025



Introduction

1. [The Global Movement Against Statelessness \(GMAS\)](#) and [the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion \(ISI\)](#) welcome the opportunity provided by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, to contribute to her final report to the Human Rights Council. This joint submission is made on behalf of HRDs working to promote the right to a nationality and the rights of stateless people across the globe, including organisations and initiatives led by HRDs who themselves are stateless or from stateless communities, including [Citizenship Affected People's Network \(CAPN\)](#) in Nepal, [Warsheh](#) in Syria, added by way of Annexes, and other organisations which will remain anonymous in this submission due to safety concerns.
2. This joint submission focuses in particular on the risks they face, the protection gaps that persist, and recommendations on measures required to ensure their safety and recognition.

Contributions of HRDs working on statelessness

1. Statelessness refers to the condition of not being recognised as a national by any country, which affects millions worldwide and results in the denial of basic rights and services. Protecting the right to a nationality is therefore essential to realising other human rights and countering systemic discrimination.
2. The contributions of HRDs working on statelessness are essential to the advancement of equality, human rights and sustainable development. At the **local and national level**, HRDs provide direct support to affected communities while advocating for legal and policy change by putting at risk their own safety. They assist individuals navigate discriminatory documentation systems, raise awareness on rights, support access to essential services and accompany them along the way with empowerment, trauma-informed practices and trust. In many contexts, they have been at the forefront of campaigns to reform nationality laws, including those that discriminate on the basis of gender or ethnicity, often securing commitments to reform.

3. At the **regional level**, HRDs have worked collectively through coalitions and networks to influence political and human rights agendas. This has contributed to the development of roadmaps, declarations and model laws that recognise the urgency of eradicating statelessness and the importance of equal nationality rights. By linking national struggles to regional frameworks, HRDs amplify their impact and generate momentum for reform.
4. At the **international level**, HRDs bring the perspectives of stateless communities to global forums. They make submissions to UN treaty bodies, engage Special Rapporteurs and participate in Human Rights Council sessions, ensuring that statelessness is addressed as a human rights concern. Their participation in international advocacy spaces has been instrumental in raising the visibility of statelessness and situating the right to a nationality within broader human rights and development agendas.
5. HRDs working on statelessness also play a critical role in building solidarity and reshaping narratives. By humanising statelessness and connecting it to broader struggles for racial justice, gender equality and minority rights, they have expanded public understanding and mobilised support for reform. In doing so, their efforts strengthen not only the statelessness movement, but also the wider human rights movement. Their work is indispensable to advancing equality, inclusion and justice for all.

Risks and challenges faced by HRDs working on statelessness

6. HRDs working on statelessness face severe and unique risks. These risks arise both from the hostile contexts in which many operate and the precarious legal, social and economic position of stateless people themselves.

Harassment, hate speech and stigmatisation

7. Statelessness intersects with entrenched racism, sexism and xenophobia. HRDs who challenge these injustices are often targeted for smear campaigns, which can escalate to threats of physical harm. Women HRDs and minority community activists have been subjected to online abuse and threats designed to delegitimise their work and intimidate them into silence.
8. Hate speech, often propagated through social media, has been weaponised to incite violence and persecution against communities such as Rohingya. Reports indicate that [Facebook](#)'s algorithms amplified anti-Rohingya content, fuelling violence and displacement. Despite calls for accountability, no cases have been brought against known disseminators, while HRDs face legal repercussions for their freedom of expression.

Intimidation, criminalisation and violence

9. HRDs working to expose human rights violations against stateless people frequently face direct retaliation from both state and non-state actors. Police harassment and punitive action are common in some contexts. Alarming, some States have increasingly used deprivation of nationality as a tool to punish and silence HRDs. These reprisals not only endanger individual HRDs but create a broader climate of fear to deter advocacy.

10. In Palestine, HRDs face severe and systemic restrictions on their work and movement, including travel bans, arbitrary [detention](#), home raids and confiscation of documentation by the colonial Israeli regime. Amid the ongoing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, many HRDs documenting Israeli crimes, human rights violations, or advocating for justice face intimidation, constant surveillance, and criminalization of their activism. In the Dominican Republic, [Dominican HRDs of Haitian descent](#) have also faced intimidation, arbitrary detentions and risks to deportations. Civil society actors working to defend the rights of these communities have also been subjected to harassment, both online and offline, as well as attempts to delegitimize their work. Due to restrictive legislation and security threats, civil society actors increasingly rely on the development of informal support networks and collaboration with regional and international organizations to amplify the voices of vulnerable populations.¹

Lack of legal status, travel restrictions and other basic services

11. Stateless HRDs who wish to travel to attend UN sessions, trainings or regional convenings frequently cannot obtain passports. Even those with temporary travel documents risk being denied visas, refused entry at borders, detained or deported because their stateless status arouses suspicion. In many cases, virtual engagement becomes the only alternative, which, is not often an option for HRDs to raise their voices, and when it is an option, interpretation should be offered for language inclusivity.
12. At the same time, the interconnected nature of current administrative, legal and economic systems continues to reinforce exclusion for those without documents, highlighting the urgent need for systemic change to break these barriers and ensure genuine and equal participation. For instance, stateless people's legal and banking status often means they are unable to be compensated for the work they carry out even when funding is available.
13. Although there is a growing effort to include more stateless people in decision-making spaces, genuine participation remains challenging. Too often, affected people are invited merely to share personal stories rather than to meaningfully shape policies or solutions. This process requires sustained support, especially for those who have had limited access to education, along with trauma-informed and protective approaches that prevent re-traumatization. As activism itself is a form of empowerment, it is vital for HRDs to engage in practical activities that allow them to experience agency, build confidence, believe in their talents and see tangible outcomes from their work.

Financial insecurity and funding precarity

14. A defining challenge for HRDs working on statelessness is chronic financial insecurity. Statelessness has historically been a neglected issue for donors, meaning that HRDs in this field often operate on the margins, with little or no predictable funding. Unlike other areas of the human rights sector which attract sustained donor interest, HRDs working on statelessness are typically reliant on short-term, ad hoc grants that fail to cover core costs or long-term strategies. Stateless HRDs face additional barriers: the absence of legal identity documents often prevents formal registration, barring access to donor compliance systems such as bank accounts and due diligence checks. This results in a profoundly unequal playing field where impacted-person-led

¹ Reference by partner organisations in Libya where the main risks faced include restrictive laws, security harassment, lack of protection, and social risks such as stigma and media smear campaigns.

initiatives are rarely resourced to lead or influence policy discussions and are instead forced into dependent partnerships with larger, legally recognised NGOs - diluting the voices of those with lived experience.

15. The UNHCR's 2025 budget crisis resulting in a 40% reduction in resources has severely undermined statelessness work and civil society engagement. UNHCR [reported](#) a \$230 million funding drop from 2024 to 2025 for local and national partners, disproportionately affecting organisations led by stateless people. The number of grant agreements also dropped from 251 to just 70. Further key losses include the elimination of dedicated statelessness staff at national and regional levels, withdrawal of operational support to civil society organisations, and closure or restructuring of regional offices. The Southern Africa Regional Bureau, for example, was closed in September 2025 and merged into a broader Eastern and Southern Africa Bureau. Only two out of seven Regional Statelessness Officer posts remain. These roles, previously central to collaboration with civil society and regional actors, were foundational to the progress made over the past decade. Without a clear mitigation strategy, these cuts risk dismantling critical protection infrastructure and reversing significant advances in the statelessness sector, placing human rights defenders and affected communities in an increasingly precarious position.
16. The impact of funding cuts is illustrated through a range of delayed documentation, halting operations and services, halting advocacy engagements, strained asylum systems, reduced legal assistance, and lack of community support, leaving stateless people exposed to exploitation, detention and forced returns. We liaised with some of our partner organisations for input on how the funding cuts have impacted their work and received the following responses;
 - In the US, one partner organisation faces a risk of shutting down their legal services clinic. In Europe, several UNHCR country offices have either been closed or downsized and several members of the regional network, European Network on Statelessness (ENS), were also directly impacted by the US foreign aid cuts.
 - In Africa, the Southern African Nationality Network (SANN) operated without funding for the first half of 2025, disrupting coordination and joint advocacy. The closure of UNHCR's Regional Bureau and lack of a sub-regional statelessness focal point further weakened engagement with SADC government and slowed momentum on the African Union Protocol on the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness. Our partner organisations in Libya face similar challenges in reduced the ability of local organizations to carry out awareness and documentation campaigns on a regular basis, leading to reliance on voluntary work and collaborative partnerships.
 - In Asia, there is weakened regional coordination to continue statelessness work. Apart from the downsizing of UNHCR offices, the regional civil society network working to end statelessness, The Statelessness and Dignified Citizenship Coalition – Asia Pacific (SDCC-AP) risks collapsing without Secretariat support. The regional organisation working to end statelessness, Nationality for All (NFA), has had their funding paused for two months. Family Frontiers from Malaysia emphasized the struggle for civil society to raise statelessness issues.

17. Sustained funding is crucial for national organisations and regional coalitions to advocate effectively and to maintain visibility and momentum. Across regions, there is still uncertainty of whether there will be funding to support CSO implementing partners to undertake statelessness work in 2026. The cuts also indirectly lead to more competition with organisations knocking on the same donors' doors within the statelessness field. There is an acute need for diversifying and engaging more donors to lend its focus towards the statelessness field.
18. These disruptions are not simply technical or operational, they are existential. HRDs that have relied on UNHCR grants to maintain staff or office space face the real prospect of closure. Without resources to pay salaries, cover legal aid or support spaces for organising, HRDs in the field are left more vulnerable to harassment, burnout and silencing. In this way, financial insecurity itself becomes a protection risk: it strips HRDs of the minimal safety nets that allow them to continue their advocacy safely and sustainably, leaving the broader movement to end statelessness dangerously weakened. Recent innovations, such as the [Global Statelessness Fund](#) and the Global Alliance to End Statelessness [online marketplace](#) offer hope but remain insufficient to cover the widening gaps.

Protection gaps specific to stateless HRDs

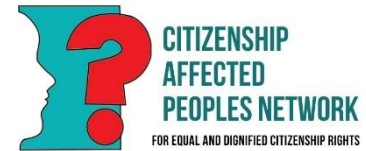
19. The above risks and challenges are exacerbated by the fact that stateless human rights defenders face unique risks, yet existing protection mechanisms often overlook their specific circumstances, leaving critical gaps that compromise their safety, well-being, and ability to continue their work.
20. First, most countries lack specific measures to protect HRDs, and where such measures exist, they typically assume the defender is a citizen or legal resident. Stateless HRDs, by definition, lack secure legal status or documentation; they may be unable or unwilling to seek help from State authorities due to fear of detention or deportation. This means stateless HRDs are often left to seek alternative forms of protection, such as support from community groups, civil society networks, sympathetic diplomats or international organisations.
21. Second, mobility restrictions create a major protection gap. When threats escalate, at-risk HRDs are often advised to temporarily relocate or go into exile. Stateless HRDs, however, cannot simply apply for a visa or asylum as easily as others. Lacking a passport, they depend on receiving countries or UN agencies to provide special travel documents or humanitarian waivers. Programmes like shelter cities, fellowships or emergency visas for HRDs may inadvertently exclude stateless activists because of documentation requirements. This calls for creative solutions such as expedited issuance of emergency travel documents, or greater flexibility by States and the UN to assist stateless HRDs in cross-border travel and resettlement when needed.
22. Third, there is limited inclusion of stateless HRDs in global and regional protection networks. While international civil society has developed mechanisms to support journalists, women human rights defenders, environmental defenders and others, those working on statelessness remain largely invisible. Statelessness is often seen as a niche issue and the defenders addressing it are excluded from broader coalitions. Language barriers, digital divides and lack of visibility mean that they are rarely reached by training, psychosocial support or urgent protection grants. This leaves defenders isolated and unsupported, particularly in times of crisis.

Recommendations

23. Based on the above information, we urge the Special Rapporteur to make the following recommendations to strengthen the protection, recognition and resourcing of HRDs working to promote the right to a nationality and the rights of stateless people:

- I. Recognise HRDs working to promote the right to a nationality and the rights of stateless people - particularly those with lived experience of statelessness - as a distinct group of defenders facing specific and compounded risks, and ensure their inclusion in national and international protection frameworks.
- II. End the use of deprivation or denial of nationality as a means to silence or punish HRDs, and ensure compliance with the international standards prohibiting arbitrary loss or [deprivation of nationality](#).
- III. Address the chronic underfunding of statelessness work, recognising financial insecurity as a serious protection risk for HRDs in this field. Encourage UN agencies and donors to develop mitigation plans to sustain statelessness programming and civil society engagement, and to establish flexible, accessible funding channels for impacted-person-led groups.
- IV. Ensure that HRDs working on statelessness can safely participate in regional and international advocacy by facilitating access to travel documents and humanitarian visas, ensuring that relocation and protection programmes explicitly include stateless HRDs, and adopting flexible approaches that enable meaningful participation in UN and other multilateral forums, including virtual participation and interpretation.
- V. Adopt protection frameworks that recognise and respond to the intersectional risks faced by HRDs working on statelessness - including women, those belonging to ethnic/religious, LGBTQ+, displaced groups, and people with disabilities - working on statelessness. Encourage the development of gender-sensitive, disability-inclusive, culturally responsive and trauma-informed protection responses, including access to psychosocial support, safe spaces and peer accompaniment mechanisms.
- VI. Strengthen the effectiveness of international accountability mechanisms by promoting simplified, accessible procedures for HRDs, including addressing language and bureaucratic barriers. This should be accompanied by local awareness-raising, stronger follow-up with States on implementation of communications and collaboration with civil society to ensure national-level impact and protection of HRDs engaging with these mechanisms.

Annex I – Voices at the local level



Citizenship Affected People's Network (CAPN) from Nepal

1. What motivates you to uphold, protect, or promote human rights? (This may include, for example, work promoting women's rights, LGBTI rights, rights of minorities, labour rights, environmental rights, children's rights, housing rights, migrants' rights, health rights, etc – this list is non-exhaustive). Please give examples.

CAPN is motivated by its vision to achieve gender equal citizenship rights for women and for the children of single mothers in Nepal. It is driven by the motivation to eradicate Nepal's persistent gender discriminatory citizenship laws, which deny Nepali women the independent right to confer citizenship upon their children or spouse, in parity with men. This discrimination is rooted in the patriarchal social and legal structure that believes the family lineage or descent only flows through men. Despite significant strides the Nepali legal system has made in ensuring women's rights, women continue to hold a second-class status when it comes to legal identity, the root of one's legal and social inclusion, and legal standing. Founded and led by individuals with lived experience of these challenges firsthand, CAPN is dedicated to advancing dignified and gender equal citizenship rights and supporting affected individuals holistically. The belief that no one should endure the distress of being denied belongingness to one's own country and of identity or face such challenges alone drives CAPN's work on human rights of individuals and communities across its intersectional landscape.

Civil society in Nepal was previously viewed with a degree of cautious acceptance, but this perception has shifted significantly in recent weeks. Following the mass protests on September 8 and 9, the dissolution of the House of Representatives, and the Prime Minister's resignation, an interim government has been formed. These political changes have fueled widespread speculation that the events were influenced by foreign intervention and that the interim government is being swayed by foreign powers. This narrative has led to a surge in nationalist rhetoric and heightened public suspicion of NGOs and CSOs. While human rights work is not explicitly restricted, an indirect but powerful force driven by politicized narratives, social beliefs, and corruption has created significant friction, making it increasingly challenging for civil society actors and human rights defenders to work effectively. NGOs and human rights advocates are now seen in a more negative light than before, particularly by certain government officials and sections of the public. Given the current political context, where narratives of foreign intervention are dominating public and political discourse, the possibility of CAPN coming under greater scrutiny has increased significantly. Citizenship is a highly politicized and security-sensitive issue in Nepal, and any organization working in this space can easily become a target of suspicion. As the environment becomes more volatile, there is also a real risk of increased restrictions or crackdowns on organizations like ours.

2. Do you believe your work is contributing to the creation of a more equal, more just, or fairer society in which you live? Please give examples for your answer.

Yes. Citizenship is the gateway to all rights. It is the right to have rights. Its denial pushes people and society towards marginalization and invisibility. Those without citizenship lack access to education, employment, social security, and most critically, recognition by the state, which leaves them without state protection of fundamental rights. Our advocacy for gender equal citizenship rights in Nepal and for its constitutional guarantee along with individual case support to affected individuals have significantly contributed to the creation or rather to the goal to achieve a more equal, more just and fairer society in which we live. Our work at CAPN strives to bring social change and advocate for legal reform to empower women with the right to confer citizenship. This not only uplifts women but also ensures protection and

equality for all members of society, fostering a more just and inclusive Nepal, and aids overall nation development. A win-win for all parties.

3. a) If you live in a country where there is some space to engage in human rights work, how do you believe your society would have developed differently if this work were not permitted?

Without the space to engage in human rights work, civil society's role in advancing social justice would be severely limited. People and communities who hold higher in the social and political power dynamics would have all the leeway to set negative narratives and unwarranted restrictions. In Nepal, even though the human rights work is not explicitly scrutinized, an indirect force fueled by politicized narratives, social beliefs, and corruption has created friction, thus hindering progress. NGOs and human rights advocates are sometimes viewed with a level of skepticism by some government officials. These political, social, cultural narratives and belief system and their materialization into a restrictive environment hinder civil society actors and human rights advocates from working to their full potential. For instance, CAPN's work on issues related to citizenship denial is often viewed with skepticism and mistrust because gender equal citizenship is often associated with national security against foreign nationals illegally taking citizenship at Nepal's border. While these two issues are completely unrelated, one about equality and another about strengthening its administrative system, the xenophobic narrative created a barrier in CAPN's work. Without these obstacles, Nepali society likely would have recognized the need to reform discriminatory citizenship laws sooner, with stronger political will enabling timely legal reforms and fostering inclusive policy-making and social accountability.

b) If you live in a country where there is very limited space for human rights work, how do you try to create more space to do your work? Please give examples.

While Nepal does not have an outright closed environment for human rights work, the issue relating to citizenship is highly sensitive due to nationalism and security concerns. CAPN's work undergoes constant skepticism and scrutiny especially during individual case support, where the opposition is felt both from societal level and government level. However, there also has been positive experiences where the community members and government officials have cooperated very well in discussion to interpret laws for seemingly complex citizenship issues. CAPN builds trust with the government by demonstrating that its efforts benefit national interests and advocating collaboratively rather than defensively. Engagement and partnerships with government bodies help create space despite scrutiny and accusations against civil society, especially that working on citizenship related issue.

4. Please describe what piece of human rights work you have carried out or contributed to that you are most proud of over the past five years.

CAPN functions under three pillars: Social Awareness, Policy Advocacy and Safe Haven.

Each of CAPN's work and sustained advocacy falls within these pillars and is led by those affected themselves, transforming personal struggles into collective advocacy for equal citizenship rights, individual case support, alliance building (nationally and internationally), and amplifying affected voices are the highlight. There are two ongoing initiatives that CAPN has been successfully operating.

First, is our *Sahayatri* Initiative, that is established on the bases of CAPN's years of firsthand experience of providing individual case support to affected individuals. It is more than just a paralegal support. It involves a true companionship to the affected person in every step, ensuring a dignified experience in their citizenship acquisition process. The second is our flagship school outreach programs, through which

we engage with high school children from grade up, to make them aware about the importance of birth registration and through them to their parents and family members. The underlying effect of the outreach has also been that students who are themselves going through difficulties acquiring birth registration or citizenship certificate reach out to CAPN for assistance or counseling. This naturally leads CAPN to providing individual case support.

CAPN's community-driven social awareness campaigns counter myths and promote rights-based discourse, while its Safe Haven initiative empowers individuals with skills and opportunities to mitigate barriers from statelessness. Advocacy tactics include strategic litigation, policy consultations, and public engagement, rooted in evidence-based research and lived experience. These efforts are adapted to overcome systemic barriers such as bureaucratic complexity, stigma, and resource deprivation.

5. Has your work been impacted by funding cuts in the past 12 months? If so, please describe what these cuts have prevented you from being able to do.

Yes. Funding for citizenship-related work has generally been limited. Many international donors are not fully aware of the prevalence and severity of statelessness and citizenship challenges in Nepal. With the current political climate, the funding pool has become even more constrained, which has restricted some of our planned activities and initiatives.

6. If your work has been impacted by funding cuts, please describe how you are attempting to mitigate the impact of the cuts.

To mitigate the impact, we are actively applying to all potential funding sources and reaching out to donors who have previously supported other organizations. By building familiarity around the issue of citizenship and highlighting its urgency, we aim to encourage continued and expanded support for our work. One of the major supports to CAPN has come from the Global Statelessness Fund (GSF), a statelessness dedicated fund. This flexible, direct support is tailored to the community-led advocacy, strengthening our capacity to carry on our national advocacy.

7. What is the single biggest risk you face in your work? This could be, for example, financial sustainability, restrictive legislation, a hostile public, physical attack, legal action, criminalization, unsupportive community/family, media or social media smear campaigns or gendered discrimination (this list is non-exhaustive).

The risks we face in our work are multi-faceted, encompassing financial, legal, social, and political challenges.

- **Financial sustainability** is a major concern, as funding for citizenship and statelessness work is very limited. Very few donors are familiar with the issue or recognize its severity, making resources scarce.
- **Restrictive legislation** also poses a significant risk. The Constitution of Nepal itself is discriminatory, as women cannot confer citizenship to their children. This lack of legal protection not only limits our advocacy work but also exposes civil society members to scrutiny. Nepal is not a signatory to both the statelessness convention.
- **Hostile public and unsupportive communities** further complicate our work. Nationalism is high, particularly given Nepal's open border with India, and many people see changes to citizenship laws as a threat to national security. Xenophobia and patriarchal societal norms reinforce resistance to gender-equal citizenship.

- **Political and social risks** are also present. Civil society members are often labeled as foreign agents, which can threaten their security and reputations. There is limited political will to amend discriminatory laws, and the media frequently frames citizenship as a political rather than a human rights issue, which undermines public support.
- **Gender discrimination** (patriarchy) permeates society, politics, and the media. The deeply patriarchal mindset not only affects public attitudes but also influences policymakers, making progress slow and risky for those advocating for change.

In short, the risks we face are interconnected: legal restrictions, public hostility, political resistance, financial scarcity, media opposition, and entrenched social discrimination all combine to make working on citizenship and statelessness extremely challenging.

8. Do you think international standards on human rights (as contained in Universal Declaration on Human Rights, ICCPR, ICESCR, HRD Declaration, etc.) are still relevant? Please give a reason for your answer.

International human rights standards such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), ICCPR, ICESCR, and CEDAW remain highly relevant, particularly as guiding frameworks that affirm universal gender equality and the right to nationality. However, mere ratification by states like Nepal is insufficient unless accompanied by genuine political will and transparent, meaningful engagement in implementation. For rights affected by gender-discriminatory laws, these standards provide a crucial benchmark for advocacy, accountability, and law reform. CAPN's experience shows that community-led approaches aligned with these standards and principles provide culturally relevant and effective pathways towards realizing these rights.

9. Do you think the international human rights mechanisms (for example, UN Treaty Bodies, UN Special Procedures, the UN Human Rights Council, the UPR, the Inter-American Commission and Court on Human Rights, the European Court on Human Rights, the African Commission and Court on Human and Peoples' Rights) are effective in protecting the work of human rights defenders? If yes, please explain why. If no, please state what you believe may be a more effective way to protect human rights defenders?

International mechanisms offer important platforms for elevating human rights defenders' concerns, documenting violations, and pressuring governments for reform. However, their effectiveness depends on the state's willingness to respond and engage, which remains limited in Nepal's context regarding citizenship and statelessness. These mechanisms often produce symbolic compliance without substantive change. Therefore, effectiveness is enhanced when they are complemented by locally grounded, community-led initiatives like CAPN, which embody intersectional inclusion, cultural relevancy, and sustained grassroots advocacy, supported by international solidarity and capacity-building networks.

10. Do you find the international human rights mechanisms, as outlined above, easy to access? Please give reasons for your answers.

International human rights mechanisms are challenging to navigate and access for many civil society organizations, especially emerging CSOs that are led by affected individuals, like CAPN. Resource constraints, limited technical expertise, and political sensitivities around nationality issues have been some of the barriers in fully engaging or accessing international human rights mechanisms. CAPN bridges these gaps through strategic partnerships with legal experts, networks, and capacity-building support

from regional and global organizations. Continuous feedback from affected communities ensures that CAPN's participation remains accountable and grounded in lived experience, even in contexts of limited digital access and bureaucratic obstacles.

11. a) Do you believe communications sent by the Special Rapporteur to governments which are alleged to have violated the rights of human rights defenders are an effective means of protection? Please give examples for your answer.

Communications from the Special Rapporteur raise important international awareness and exert diplomatic pressure, which can create protective visibility for human rights defenders facing legal or political threats. However, their protection effectiveness depends largely on the government's responsiveness and political context. In Nepal, while such communications add weight to advocacy, they must be coupled with sustained grassroots mobilization, legal support, and trust-building efforts from community-led organizations like CAPN to mitigate risks comprehensively.

12. What is the most important message that you would like the Special Rapporteur to bring to the international community about human rights and human rights defenders?

The international community must recognize and support the critical role of stateless-led, community-centric organizations like CAPN that combine legal advocacy with psychosocial, social inclusion, and economic empowerment to address complex citizenship and statelessness issues. Protecting human rights defenders requires fostering genuine collaboration, flexible funding, and capacity building that prioritizes affected communities' leadership and lived experience. Governments must be urged to take international human rights recommendations seriously and to enable safe environments for grassroots organizations to operate without fear of reprisal, acknowledging that civil society is indispensable for democratic governance and sustainable human rights progress.



Warsheh Team from Syria

We are the Warsheh Team, advocating for marginalized and overlooked groups in Syria, from detainees and their families to women and their children. Since 2017, we have led the “My Nationality is Their Right” campaign, focusing on women denied the right to pass nationality to their children. This problem has grown more urgent following the revolution and ongoing conflict. Many women have been compelled to marry foreigners or individuals of unknown parentage, resulting in a growing number of stateless children who are deprived of fundamental rights such as identity, education, healthcare, and freedom of movement. In this context, our work as human rights defenders seeks to amplify the voices of the stateless and to address the urgent human rights concerns, they face directly.

Engaging in this work has exposed our team and the affected women to direct risks and persistent pressures. On one occasion, a team member was detained by former authorities after being reported by a mother who feared repercussions for engaging with human rights organizations. Beyond this, team members face ongoing threats and cyberattacks due to misunderstandings of our advocacy, while many mothers refrain from participating in awareness or documentation activities out of fear for their safety. The lack of official documents compounds these challenges, making travel or attendance at international forums nearly impossible and limiting opportunities to share their experiences. Together, these obstacles illustrate the daily security, social, and practical barriers encountered by stateless human rights defenders in Syria.

Despite these risks, we have continued to document the needs of affected communities and implement programs to empower women. In 2024, we recorded information on 570 stateless mothers in northeast Syria. We launched a training program for mothers aimed at breaking the barrier of fear and enabling them to engage in advocacy with the government, with our support. The program covers local and international nationality laws, political negotiation skills, media visibility, and ongoing psychosocial support. These efforts are complemented by key research and reports, including People Without Rights (a legal analysis of Decree No. 276), studies on the social, economic, and psychological impact of statelessness on women and mothers, analyses of donor and civil society marginalization of this issue, and research on how education, residency, and health policies exacerbate the crisis.

However, significant gaps remain. The absence of official documents continues to deprive mothers and children of fundamental rights and restrict their participation in national and international platforms. Funding remains limited, as many donors decline support in the absence of reliable statistics or documentation, reinforcing the invisibility of the problem and reducing its priority on international agendas. With attention focused on other urgent issues such as detainees, education, and reconstruction, most Syrian civil society organizations do not prioritize statelessness. Consequently, our team bears the primary responsibility for this advocacy, navigating financial, logistical, and social challenges while women defenders face compounded discrimination and limited protection mechanisms.

Recommendations:

Ensure the direct inclusion of stateless human rights defenders, affected mothers, and organizations working on this issue in national and international forums to have their voices heard.

Prioritize statelessness and women’s right to confer nationality as part of policy agendas, especially in light of current political changes in Syria.

Establish support and advocacy mechanisms in coordination with our team to engage with and pressure the new government to strengthen the rights of women and children at risk of statelessness.

Enhance data collection, reliable statistics, and ongoing documentation to highlight the scale of the problem and its social and human rights impacts.