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A day in the life of... Nikolai Levasov, activist for equal human rights for stateless people in the United States

“Stateless people are the most vulnerable people in the world” – these words are cited in many articles and reports. Being stateless myself brings an understanding of this vulnerability to a whole different level. Aside from day-to-day materialistic challenges such as no access to identification, healthcare, education, and the ability to travel, there is an unseen impact of immense stress on a stateless life.”

Read the full interview in this month’s “A day in the life of...” at the bottom of this bulletin.

Rohingya: Attention turns to Myanmar as violence continues

On 24 August the final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, '[Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine](#)', was released. In the report, the Commission among other recommendations calls on the government of Myanmar to tackle Rohingya statelessness, to 'revisit' the 1982 Citizenship law, and end restrictions on freedom of movement. Other recommendations ask the state to ensure full and unfettered humanitarian access throughout the state and to hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable.

The Rohingya have been without citizenship since their 'exclusion' from nationality on the basis of the 1982 citizenship law. They have faced gross violations of their human rights, including being barred from the right to freedom of movement, for generations. And over the last year have seen the consequences of a military crackdown including the burning of villages, rape of women and children, killing civilians and leaving more than 90.000 people displaced.

The Advisory Commission lead by former UN-head mr. Kofi Annan, got to its recommendations following a one year period that included the coordinated attacks by Rohingya militants on police outposts in October 2016, and the military crackdown on Rohingya that followed. The crackdown was said by the Office of the UN High Commission for Human Rights to most probably [amount to crimes against humanity](#), an accusation denied by Myanmar officials, and has led to the creation of a [Fact Finding Mission](#). In a response, and while stating that it [would not cooperate](#) with the Fact Finding Mission, the Myanmar government has set up its own Commission to . The former is expected to publish its findings then and then, the latter I don't know .

The military crackdown was followed by renewed violence, when Rohingya militants attacked police posts in a series of violent clashes that received wide media coverage. Some examples: [\[BBC\]](#) [\[the Australian\]](#) [\[Reuters\]](#)

Additionally, Pope Francis has [announced](#) that he will travel to Myanmar and Bangladesh later in 2017 for a visit aiming to focus international attention to the plight of the stateless Rohingya. In August, the Pope also called on states to [respect the right to a nationality](#), ensuring every child acquires nationality at birth.

Statelessness Summer Course 2017

During the first week of August, the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion hosted its annual Statelessness Summer Course at Tilburg University, the Netherlands. Just under 30 people working on statelessness from 23 different countries attended it. They represented civil society, lawyers, governments, academics, UN staff and INGOs. The course offered participants with knowledge, tools and skills to address statelessness. This year saw group work, a plurality of workshops - covering topics such as discrimination, the SDGs and arbitrary deprivation of nationality - as well as expert Masterclasses by Kerry Neal (UNICEF), Radha Govil (UNHCR) and Gábor Gyulai (Hungarian Helsinki Committee).



The Course was really well received by its participants, receiving a Net Promoter Score of 100, the highest possible scoring, indicating that all participants were highly likely to recommend this course to their peers. Here's what some of the participants had to say about the experience:

"A really informative and interesting course for anyone working on statelessness at any level. Great facilitators, practical and useful for my work." **Nina Murray, European Network on Statelessness**

"The course has equipped me with relevant tools and resources to continue and strengthen my work on statelessness issues; as well as renew my commitment to advocate and contribute to finding solutions". **Johanna Roldan, UNHCR Thailand**

"I'm speechless. The course was much better than I expected it to be." **Mohammed Al-Fadhly, Stateless activist**

In case this makes you curious to know more about the upcoming **2018 edition of the Statelessness Summer Course**, keep an eye on www.institutesi.org/courses and announcements through this bulletin.

What's new: Law and policy

[The U.S. Supreme Court makes citizenship revocation harder](#): In the *Maslenjak v. United States* ruling, concerning the Bosnian Serb woman who lied about the whereabouts of her husband who participated in the Srebrenica massacre during her naturalisation process, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that to revoke citizenship of a person who committed a crime in the naturalisation process, the government needed to prove that the crime had a causal influence on the defendant's acquisition of citizenship. In cases when an individual has committed the crime of lying in the naturalisation process, 'causal influence' exists if a truthful answer would have disqualified the applicant from citizenship.

[Stateless Rastafarians in Ethiopia promised identity cards](#): The Rastafarian community in Ethiopia after years of petition to be granted citizenship status have been promised official identity by the government. Many Rastafarians have given up their Caribbean identity and could not get Ethiopian identity, leaving them stateless.

The Russian Federation **[enacted a law to strip convicted terrorists of Russian citizenship](#)** which will be come into force on 1 September 2017. The rule is applied only to naturalized citizens. Further on this, an Israeli court ruling on 6 August **[revoked the citizenship of an Arab Israeli](#)** after he was convicted of attacking and injuring Israeli soldiers.

[Turkish nationals in Bangladesh living in fear of Erdogan's long arms](#): Syed Zainul Abedin and Adil Sakhawat wrote about Turkish nationals in Bangladesh fearing the threat of denationalisation by the Turkish government as part of the aftermath of the failed coup d'état. The Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion wrote a **[Policy Brief](#)** on this situation last month.

[NGO helps Matopo villagers access identity documents](#): In preparation for the elections in 2018, mostly undocumented communities in the Mataberland regions in Zimbabwe were able to acquire identity documents through the assistance of a local NGO. Most people from the region did not have identity documents or their births registered.

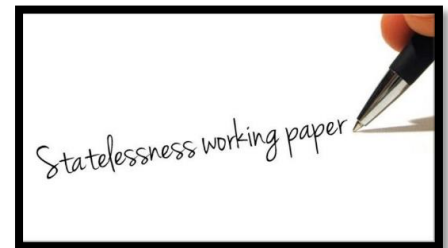
[Stateless Ex-Georgian President vows to fight for adopted homeland](#): Former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili who was stripped of his Ukrainian nationality last month for undisclosed reasons turns out to have lost his nationality because of criminal charges against him.

[Kenyans of Indian descent become 44th tribe](#): President Uhuru Kenyatta has gazetted the recognition of the Kenyans of Indian descent as the 44th tribe in Kenya and invited them to participate in the political, economic, cultural and social development of the nation.

Announcements and events

[Conference: Achieving Security and Justice for All: Elephants in the Room](#): As part of the Knowledge Platform – Security and Rule of Law’s annual conference in the Hague on **7 September**, ISI Co-Director Laura van Waas and Senior-Researcher Zahra Albarazi will present statelessness issues in the context of Syrian refugees, framed by the Platform as one of “the contentious things we usually ignore when working on peace, security & rule of law” that the conference explicitly focuses on. **Registration is possible via the website.**

[Call for Papers: ISI Statelessness Working Paper Series](#): The Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion is looking for contributions for its Statelessness Working Paper Series, an online, open access resource for centralising and sharing the latest knowledge, developments, and research findings on statelessness from multiple fields (including, but not limited to law, sociology, history, economics and health). **Deadline for submissions is 15 September.**



[Vacancy: Legal Officer ECRE](#): ECRE is offering a 12-months Legal Officer’s post starting in October 2017, a position that will provide legal and litigation support to ECRE and ELENA members. **Application deadline: 18 September.**



[Debate: LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND: Achieving human rights & development for vulnerable communities](#): The Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion is holding a public debate in Tilburg on **20 September**, to discuss the mechanics of the global human rights and development systems and explore the challenges faced by vulnerable communities in benefiting from them. This event celebrates the launch of two new ISI tools: “STATELESSNESS & HUMAN RIGHTS: The Universal Periodic Review” and “STATELESSNESS: For Development Actors”. The speakers will be Nicola Jägers, Commissioner at The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights; Laura van Waas, ISI Co-Director; Rene Rouwette, Director of KOMPASS, a new Dutch NGO for human rights advocacy; and Suzi Rostomyan, Student and Board Member of MUN Tilburg, who participated in a learning trip to Geneva with ISI to explore the workings of the Universal Periodic Review.

[Funding opportunity: SYLFF “Forced Migration” - 2 grants for doctoral researchers](#): Under the Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund, the RUB Research School in cooperation with the Tokio Foundation offers two grants for doctoral researchers working on interdisciplinary topics under the overarching topic of forced migration. **Application deadline: 24 September 2017.**

[Vacancy: Research Fellow Centre on Statelessness](#): The newly established Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness at Melbourne Law School seeks two experienced researchers to develop and execute an innovative program of legal and other research with the aim of understanding the causes of statelessness and identifying solutions towards every person having a nationality. **Application deadline: 15 October 2017.**

[Call for Papers: Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Groups: On the Margins of the Welfare State?](#): Social Inclusion journal, open access journal indexed in the Web of Science-ESCI and Scopus (CiteScore 0.49), welcomes abstracts for an issue on the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and how these are (or not) met in advanced welfare states. **Deadline for Abstracts is 31 December 2017. The deadline for submission of full papers is 15 to 31 March 2018.**

[Conference: Populism, Nationalism and Human Rights](#): Conference on populism, nationalism and human rights at Maastricht University on 11 and 12 January 2018. Check the link for further details to be announced.

What's new: Publications, tools, and resources

[Solving statelessness: Interpreting the right to Nationality](#): Article by Caia Vlieks, Ernst Hirsch Ballin and Maria José Recalde Vela that uses three different lenses to better understand the meaning of a response to statelessness, thereby examining what is necessary to solve statelessness in a sustainable manner that enhances the enjoyment of human rights.

[Explainer: How Do Australia's Proposed Citizenship Laws Compare Internationally?](#) Sangeetha Pillai in the Conversation sets out how Australia's proposed citizenship laws compare internationally, focusing on the total time a prospective citizen must have lived in the country before being eligible to apply for citizen or how long they must have spent as a permanent resident in those countries.

[The "Stateless Person" Definition in Selected EU Member States: Variations of Interpretation and Application](#): The latest issue of Refugee Survey Quarterly (RSQ) includes an article by Katia Bianchini who studied the use of the definition of a stateless person by 10 EU Member States, unveiling a big variety in interpretation and application. Additionally, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor and Amsterdam International Law Clinic issued a report, [The concept of 'Stateless Persons' in European Union Law](#), setting out the legal position of 'Stateless Persons' in the European Union, shedding light on the EU's laws concerning stateless persons and proposing a strategy to have the Court of Justice of the European Union to issue a ruling in this regard, to help get stateless persons from 'the grey areas.' The report suggests an interpretation of the term 'Stateless Persons' by the CJEU in relation to a combination of the provisions of the Charter.

[Existing Paradox in the Nationality Status of Biharis in Bangladesh: An Appraisal](#): M. Rahman wrote this article analysing the current status of the Biharis who despite being denied of Bangladeshi citizenship claims that they are still citizens of Bangladesh and they will not be eligible to surrender their citizenship until they acquire another country's citizenship.

[The Oxford Handbook of Citizenship](#): This Oxford Handbook, edited by Ayelet Shachar, Rainer Bauboeck, Irene Bloemraad, and Maarten Vink, brings together the latest normative and empirical debates synthesised by leading experts in the field of citizenship, analysing citizenship from multiple disciplinary perspectives.

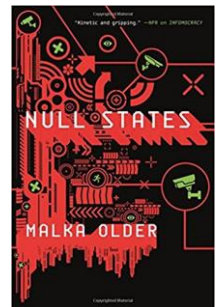
[#IBelong The Campaign to End Statelessness: Campaign Update](#): UNHCR July update on progress and developments as part of the #IBelong campaign to end statelessness.

[ICERD Quick Reference Guide: Statelessness and Human Rights Treaties](#): UNHCR and Minority Rights Group International released a Quick Reference Guide highlighting key international human rights provisions found in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination that directly relate to the prevention and reduction of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons.

[Representing Stateless Persons before U.S. Immigration Authorities](#): UNHCR launched a new resource on representing stateless persons before U.S. immigration authorities, with a focus on claims for asylum.

[Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, Special Issue on Statelessness, Irregularity, and Protection in Southeast Asia](#): This special edition of the JIRS focuses on statelessness, irregularity and protection in Southeast Asia, including on statelessness in Malaysia and "unpacking the presumed statelessness of the Rohingya" in Myanmar.

[Null States](#): Malka Older [announced](#) that she will be donating part of the earning from her latest book 'Null States' to the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion. Null States is the second book of a trilogy by Older, portraying a near-future world governed by microdemocracies - in which groups of 100,000 people, or "centenals," vote for their government according to policy, not location.



Also this month:

- [Do passports restrict economic growth?](#): Tim Harford, for the BBC World Service considers the role of passports as one of the '50 things that made the modern economy' series. There is also a [podcast](#) dedicated to the issue.
- [In limbo for 70 years, stateless West Pakistani families bear scars of partition](#): Michael Safi, for the Guardian, wrote about the stateless descendants of thousands of people who fled their homes during the British retreat from India in 1947.
- [Anchor Babies. The Challenge of Birthright Citizenship](#): In this book Leo R. Chavez explores the question of birthright citizenship, and of citizenship in the United States writ broadly, countering the often hyperbolic claims

surrounding so-called anchor babies and the use of this pejorative term in its political, historical and social contexts.

- [OCHA Haiti Humanitarian Bulletin](#): The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs includes a section on the deportation of people from the Dominican Republic following judgment TC 168-13, denationalising certain Dominicans from Haitian descent.
- [People Without a Country: The State of Statelessness](#): Bronwen Manby in short sets out on the basis of three people's cases what the state of statelessness is.
- [EMN Ad-Hoc Query on Ad Hoc Query on decision making authority regarding naturalization](#): Report collecting information from different EU member states (at the initiative of Greece) on some of the modalities of naturalisation, in particular which authority is responsible for taking decisions on applications for naturalisation.

A day in the life of...

Nikolai Levasov

Activist for equal human rights for stateless people in the United States

[*This interview is also available in [Russian](#)*]

Nikolai's expertise is based on his own experience of living as a stateless person in Estonia and being a stateless immigrant in the United States for over a decade. He has recently graduated from Lehman College of City University in New York. Nikolai believes that stateless determination procedures and further protection support can be implemented if all stakeholders including UNHCR, academia, U.S.

Government and NGOs work closely together. His current goal is to identify stateless persons on U.S. territory, educate them on the importance of participation, and to organize a Community of Stateless people in America that will unite stateless people of all ethnical backgrounds into one active group.



What kind of work do you do on statelessness and how did you get involved in it?

I was a child living in Estonia at the time of the Soviet Union collapse. Many Russian-speaking ethnic families ended up stateless due to a nationality law that did not provide immediate access to Estonian citizenship. Till this day, stateless people in Estonia cannot organize political parties and are oppressed by many discrimination laws. This harsh reality forces people such as myself to migrate to other countries. I came to the United States with unrealized dreams for an education, successful career, and basic human rights. It took many long years to go from an undocumented stateless person to a permanent resident with a path to citizenship. Once my immigration issue was resolved I looked for others to share my experience, only to learn that my path was unattainable for most. I now understood the human rights implications of my statelessness and the absence of protection support in the U.S. I knew there were many others, however undocumented and under the radar. I had an interview published in my local newspaper which got the attention of another stateless person in New York. After this contact, I wrote another article to be published in the most popular Russian newspapers in New York. This led to another email from yet another stateless person. I began to monitor social media, immigration forums and other online resources to identify stateless people around me in the United States. Many of them have already shared their stories and many more will come.

What do you hope to accomplish through your work?

I live in a country that has no statistics on its stateless population. The existence of a Community of Stateless people in America should motivate UNHCR, NGO's and the U.S. government to advance in this field. We have a long road ahead of us to initiate change. Just a year ago, most of my emails went unanswered by organizations whose mission statements claimed support for statelessness. Gradually I was able to expand social visibility and capital through making personal contacts during conferences, round tables and even receptions. My ultimate goal is for the United States to stand among others in following a determination process and providing a protection status with a path to citizenship for all stateless people on their territory solely based on this status. It is an ambitious goal made up of smaller accomplishments that will get us there step by step.

Most people working on statelessness problems have a nationality themselves. Do you think that being stateless makes you approach this work differently or make your role distinct? Can you explain / give examples?

“Stateless people are the most vulnerable people in the world” – these words are cited in many articles and reports. Being stateless myself brings an understanding of this vulnerability to a whole different level. Aside from day-to-day materialistic challenges such as no access to identification, healthcare, education, and the ability to travel, there is an unseen impact of immense stress on a stateless life. This stress is a result of a constant realization that most symptoms of everyday statelessness cannot be remedied. It is very common for stateless people to cry when sharing their stories. Many professionals avoid personal interactions with stateless persons not to share in this stress. My experience allows me to empathize with each person’s concerns and problems because some of them are still ones I am dealing with today.

Has participating in ISI’s Statelessness Summer Course given you new insights or tools to help you with your work?

First of all, I would like to thank all the people who made it possible for me to participate in this course – the Open Society Justice Initiative, personally Laura Bingham and all of the ISI course organizers. This course gave me access to facts allowing me to organize the knowledge I had already gained. It allows for my continued participation in the issue through my upcoming involvement in the Working Paper Series. I also feel that this interview is a great opportunity to openly share my concerns on the stateless people situation in the United States.

I found that this class had great structure and organization in its every aspect. I had the opportunity to meet many great people from all over the world among the course’s organizers and participants. I enjoyed many formal and informal conversations along with the invaluable academic experience. To me this was not just a summer course, but a pathway to a world that has been inaccessible to be for many years. I will always think back to Tilburg as one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life.

What do you find are the biggest challenges you face in your work?

My work in statelessness is limited by the amount of volunteer time and resources I can dedicate. This summer I am graduating from college and have to start building a professional career that can secure my future. I am constantly looking for motivated individuals to participate in group activities to promote the community we are building. One of my biggest challenges is simply explaining statelessness in a country where this issue is very little known, even among attorneys, academics and officials. This makes it challenging to prioritize this issue among all the others that modern America faces today.

What do you most enjoy about this work?

While limited in my experience and resources, even the smallest of efforts can be very gratifying. Every communication with another stateless person, activist or official is a victory which is emotionally rewarding to me, unlike any other activity. This satisfaction springs from my own personal experience as well as knowing that fighting to end statelessness is the right thing to do and will end multiple human rights violations around the world. Communication between stateless people provides them with an immediate psychological relief and I am happy to be part of it.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to get involved in / others working on statelessness?

I would like to use this opportunity to reach out to as many people as possible to encourage them to learn about the stateless situation in the United States. America being the land of immigrants has undocumented people from all over the world, but is yet to address and deal with its statelessness statistics. This is a great opportunity for anyone to shed light on the problem and be a part of the solution to bring the United States into the 21st century in dealing with statelessness. If you need facts and proof of our existence please do not hesitate to contact me at statelessnyc@gmail.com. I know that there is always a chance that stateless people are reading this interview. I am very interested to hear from you. Please don’t hesitate to contact me regardless of your background, language and geographic location.

Contribute to the Statelessness Monthly Bulletin via
news@InstituteSI.org or visit www.InstituteSI.org