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A day in the life of... Gerard van Leeuwen.
Author of 'Stateless. One Man's Struggle for an Identity' A book about the implications of having no passport, no nationality, no rights, and no belonging nowhere.

"At some point, I started to realise that I was not just writing about Kamal as an individual. He is only one of many people who are in the same situation for a myriad of reasons. I realised I could raise awareness about the fate of stateless people all around the world by writing a story that would appeal to a larger audience."

Read the full interview in this month's "A day in the life of..." at the end of this bulletin.

Rohingya Crisis – Myanmar Perpetrates Crimes Against Humanity

Since 25 August 2017, mass scale violence by Myanmar armed forces and civilian mobs – in the guise of 'clearance operations' - has resulted in the [destruction of at least 214 Rohingya villages](#), the flight of at least [500,000 refugees to Bangladesh](#), and unknown numbers of stateless Rohingya being killed, many in the most brutal of ways. The atrocity crimes, ostensibly in response to attacks on police posts by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (in which 12 police officers were killed), indiscriminately targeted Rohingya civilians in North Rakhine State, from infants to the elderly and disabled. Amidst refugee testimonies of atrocities including [gang rape](#), torture and burnings, human rights actors allege that the indiscriminate attacks of the Myanmar armed forces amount to [crimes against humanity](#). These atrocities have been described by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights as "[textbook ethnic cleansing](#)". Rights groups and research institutions had previously issued warnings of an unfolding [genocide](#) against the Rohingya, which were [revisited](#) by ISI Co-Director Amal de Chickera, in light of the current situation.

Further exacerbating the crisis, Myanmar has [prohibited the operation of most international aid agencies in North Rakhine state](#) and those in Bangladesh are [working under severe strain](#), creating a humanitarian catastrophe on both sides of the border.

It is of significant concern that [Rohingya return is being contemplated](#) and pursued even as the violence continues. The UN Secretary General has called on Myanmar to "[recognise the right of return of all those who had to leave the country](#)", and this position has been reiterated by other international actors. In parallel, India continues its efforts to [deport over 40,000](#) Rohingya refugees to Myanmar and Australia has offered to [pay Rohingya refugees](#) – currently being detained in Papua New Guinea – to return. Myanmar has also announced its willingness to allow return subsequent to a [verification process](#).

Amidst growing calls for urgent and decisive international action against Myanmar, such as this [statement](#) issued by 88 NGOs (including the Institute), the UN Secretary General briefed the [UN Security Council](#) on the situation at a [the Council's 8060th Session](#) on 28 September. The Security Council is yet to take any formal action against Myanmar.

#RomaBelong – Statelessness, Discrimination and Marginalisation of the Roma People in the Western Balkans and Ukraine

The Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI), European Network on Statelessness (ENS) and European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) are pleased to announce a [forthcoming conference in Skopje](#), on 26-27 October, which will launch a new report on the statelessness, discrimination and marginalisation of the Roma People in the Western Balkans and Ukraine.

The event is aimed at NGOs, community associations, lawyers, journalists, postgraduate students and academics as well as representatives from governments and inter-governmental organisations in order to help raise awareness and identify required collective action to address the issues raised in our research.

A detailed programme is available to [download here](#).

Conference registration is free of charge but places are limited and will be awarded on a first come, first served basis. Participants need to be able to cover their own travel and accommodation costs. To register, check the [ENS website](#) for more information and email Senada Sali senada.sali@errc.org with your name, position/organization, country of residence and motivation for attending the conference. The registration deadline is **Tuesday 10 October**.

Deprivation of nationality in the Middle East and North Africa

In [Israel](#), hundreds of Bedouins in the Negev have been stripped of their Israeli nationality and thousands more face a similar fate. According to officials in the Interior Ministry, this practice is a rectification of bureaucratic errors by the government that occurred decades ago. Knesset Member Aida Touma-Suleiman says that this practice has become an increasingly “widespread phenomenon” since 2010, and is in clear violation of Israel's Citizenship Law. Since 2010, hundreds of Bedouins have been denationalised because the government claims that either their parents or grandparents were ‘erroneously’ given Israeli nationality decades ago. Some of these individuals had held Israeli nationality for over 40 years, and include former soldiers and children of soldiers. These people were denationalised after going to offices of the Interior Ministry for a routine activity, such as renewing their passports. Without their nationality, they cannot vote, national health insurance becomes more expensive, and they cannot obtain a passport. The local authorities will also not receive government funding for those who are stateless. Rights groups and Palestinian lawmakers have said that this [policy](#) is 'blatantly illegal', arbitrary, and is a state policy to get rid of this minority population. According to the ministry, there are "2,600 Arabs" who have been denationalised or are under threat of denationalisation, but Touma-Suleiman says that the numbers are probably a lot higher than what the ministry claims, and is targeting the Bedouins in particular.

Speakers at a Side Event to the Human Rights Council in Geneva - organised by the Arab Federation for Human Rights (AFHR), titled “Human rights in Qatar: Sheikh Taleb Bin Shreim is a stark example” - criticised Qatar’s [arbitrary denationalisation](#) of Sheikh Taleb Bin Lahom Bin Shreim and 54 members of his family. The Sheikh and his family all belong to the Al-Murrah tribe. This act has been called a ‘systematic revenge’ against the family for exercising their rights to freedom of movement and of expression. The participants noted that the arbitrary measures should be considered a form of collective punishment, indicating that the revocation of the nationality of 55 members of the clan is clearly an arbitrary act by the government. The deprivation of nationality resulted in displacement and deprivation of basic rights and freedoms in areas of health, education, housing, work, mobility, and expression.

Egypt’s Cabinet [proposed](#) expanding the grounds for denationalisation in an amendment to the law regulating conditions for the withdrawal of acquired nationality. The amendment would allow for the denationalisation of those who are convicted of crimes against national security. According to the government, this would also include members of any group or entity—based in Egypt or abroad—that is illegally undermining the state's political, social or economic order. Currently, the law allows for nationality to be revoked if it is acquired through fraud. Before becoming law, the new [amendments](#) need to be approved by parliament and later ratified by the president.

Announcements and events

[Statelessness, Anoeck Steketee, Document Nederland](#): Since 1975, the Rijksmuseum has organised the annual exhibition Document Nederland, for which a Dutch photographer is asked to focus on a topical societal phenomenon. For 2017, made possible by UNCHR, Anoeck Steketee has been commissioned to depict the theme 'Stateless'.

[Gage Gallery - Nowhere People-The Children: Photographs by Greg Constantine](#): The Chicago Roosevelt University Gage Gallery fall show is an exhibition of photographer Greg Constantine's 'Nowhere People — The Children'. This poignant photography project provides insight into the lives and challenges of some of the world's stateless children, visually depicting the struggle of disenfranchisement. The show runs **through December 2**.

[Contributions to 'Report on best practices and specific measures to ensure access to birth registration'](#): The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has requested information from stakeholders, for the preparation of this report. The OHCHR in particular seeks examples of best practices to ensure the registration of children in situations of risk and marginalisation, as indicated in resolution 34/15. The information provided will be made available on the OHCHR website. Information should be sent to Imma Guerras-Delgado, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (e-mail: registry@ohchr.org, cc: iguerras-delgado@ohchr.org). **Deadline 31 October 2017**.

[London School of Economics and Political Sciences Human Rights Advocacy Course](#): This course provides participants with an in-depth analysis of the theory and practice human rights advocacy as well as advocacy undertaken within the social justice and humanitarian field. Participants will explore key examples of successful human rights advocacy and techniques that have been effective and review critiques of the legitimacy or inadequacy of the human rights approach. **Course on 16-17 November, registrations are accepted on a first come, first served basis**.

What's new: Publications, tools, and resources

[Statelessness in the Caribbean: The Paradox of Belonging in a Post-national World](#): In this book Kristy A. Belton argues that the suffering of the stateless is similar to that of the forcibly displaced, but unlike the displaced, they rarely leave the places where they were born and raised. The book addresses issues including belonging, migration and forced displacement, the treatment and inclusion of the ethnic and racial "other," human rights law, and self-determination.

[Statelessness: the world's 'hidden catastrophe'](#): Manuel Langendorf for the World Weekly magazine provides an overview of the issue of statelessness by citing a variety of situations.

Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies, [special issue on 'Statelessness, Irregularity, and Protection in Southeast Asia](#). Contains various articles on statelessness in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, the Rohingya, and children of migrants in Indonesia, to name a few topics discussed in the various articles.

[Statelessness and the global compact for migration](#): Blog post by Tendayi Bloom for the Refugee Law Initiative's Blog on Refugee Law and Forced Migration on statelessness in the Global Compact for Migration.

[Negotiating Identity and Belonging through the Invisibility Bargain: Colombian Forced Migrants in Ecuador](#): This article by Jeffrey D. Pugh in the International Migration Review argues that an "invisibility bargain" constrains the identity of migrants and their political participation. It also touches upon the issue of nationality-based discrimination against migrants, and matters of nationality, belonging, identity and exclusion.

What's new: Law and policy

[99 additional persons threatened with citizenship stripping in Turkey](#): Following recent steps taken by the government of Turkey towards the arbitrary deprivation of nationality of Turkish citizens living abroad (See the [ISI policy brief](#) of July 2017), a [second return home "Gazette Notice"](#) was issued by the Turkish Government, threatening 99 Turkish citizens in exile with the stripping of their citizenship. This notice which was published on 10 September 2017, and comes after 130 Turkish citizens were put on such notice on 5 June 2017.

[Lawmaker backs Bidoon rights](#): In Kuwait, MP Majed Al-Mutairi filed a proposed bill to protect the Bidoon's fundamental rights. He called for using the term 'stateless' as a nationality status in official documents, and granting dependent individuals visas as long as their sponsors hold valid residence status and as long as they are Kuwaiti-born. The bill also would require Bidoons to receive IDs—which can be renewed every 5 years—which would grant ID card holders access to free medical treatment, education (including higher education), the right to be issued birth and death certificates, drivers licenses, passports and other travel documents. This option will however not resolve the statelessness status and so should not be considered a complete solution.

[Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment \(Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures\) Bill 2017](#): The proposed amendment includes a provision which provides for the mandatory cancellation of approval of Australian nationality if the Minister sees fit, based on concerns over national security or criminal offences. It also allows for the discretionary revocation of approval of Australian nationality under certain circumstances, and grants the Minister with the discretion to revoke a person's Australian nationality under certain circumstances.

[Court rules Citizenship Act applies retrospectively to children born in South Africa to foreign parents](#): South Africa's Western Cape High Court ruled that children who were born in South Africa to foreign parents are entitled to apply for South African nationality, through the South African Citizenship Act 88 of 1995, even if they were born before the 2010 Amendment, which entered into effect in 2013.

[NRD mobile unit reduces number of 'stateless people' in Borneo](#): In Borneo, a mobile registration unit has been contributing to decreasing the risk of statelessness by registering births of people born in Sarawak. However, according to Telang Usan assemblyman Dennis Ngau, there is still a large number, up to 20,000, people from various indigenous communities who are still not registered.

[200,000 – 300,000 stateless children among Thailand's 3.2 million children at 'high risk'](#): Education expert Sompong Jitradup has claimed that 3.2 million children in Thailand are in dire need of direct care, intervention and support from the government. According to him, this group includes 200,000 – 300,000 stateless children, who "often cannot get access to higher education or high-paying jobs due to their legal status."

[Teenager takes Botswana government to court over nationality](#): A teenage girl whose father's application for her birth certificate was refused by the Botswanan Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs, has sought legal redress before the court. The case has the potential to change the law, as currently fathers—who are single parents in cases of an absent mother—suffer from a degree of gender discrimination regarding the nationality of their children. The child in this case was born to a Botswanan man and a Zimbabwean woman, who abandoned the child. The child is currently stateless and undocumented. The government refused to issue a birth certificate for the child—at the request of the father who is raising the child as a single father—and it is claimed that the government discriminated against them. "This is on account of section 6(2) of the Births and Deaths Registration Act which makes provision for a single unwed father in a similar position. As a result of this provision I was unable to register the birth of my child, as government officials are unable to determine the procedure to be followed to assist with the registration," the biological father of the child said in his affidavit.

[Taiwan Interior Ministry dismisses report of 20,000 stateless children](#): Taiwan's Interior Ministry dismissed a media report which claimed there were 20,000 stateless children born in the country. The report, also exposed the dire conditions in which these children live. The country's Ministry of Interior claims that only 543 children were reported stateless in the last decade.

Mikheil Saakashvili, ex-governor of Ukraine's Odesa region and former president of Georgia, who was deprived of his Ukrainian nationality in July, has [arrived](#) in Ukraine's [capital](#). He has vowed to challenge his denationalisation. Upon arrival in Ukraine, he demanded that the Ukrainian government provide him and his lawyers with all the documents related to his denationalisation. Mr. Saakashvili—who was formerly Georgian, then Ukrainian—has been stateless since July. On September 10—in defiance of Ukrainian authorities—he crossed into Ukraine from Poland, helped by hundreds of his supporters. He had vowed to live on the [Ukrainian-Polish border in a tent](#) if Ukraine's authorities do not let him enter the country. On September 18, a Ukrainian Court was scheduled to start hearings regarding his illegal entry into the country, but the hearing was postponed.

A day in the life of...

Gerard van Leeuwen

Author of 'Stateless. One Man's Struggle for an Identity', a book about the implications of having no passport, no nationality, no rights, and no belonging nowhere.

You are the author of 'Stateless. One Man's Struggle for an Identity'. Could you tell us how you got involved in writing a book on statelessness?

I went on a road trip with a friend. We headed to South-Eastern Europe due to our interest in the history of the region. We agreed to visit several humanitarian projects we were indirectly involved with in Sarajevo and Trebinje. I encountered Kamal Kojadin, the main character of the book, by chance. It all started from there. My contact, Ingrid, a German social worker told me about him. She had found him living as a beggar in one of the abandoned, dilapidated buildings in the city. She asked me to do her a favour and meet up with him. He was lonely, enjoyed talking to others and would appreciate a conversation.



What was it about Kamal, the main character of your book, that made you want to write his story down on paper?

I spoke to Kamal for several hours and he told me his extraordinary and intriguing life story. I was astonished to hear what can happen to a man for the sole reason that he has no birth certificate. That is what inspired me to write his story down. I got on well with Kamal besides and I admired the way he had survived all the misfortune in his life. At some point, I started to realise that I was not just writing about Kamal as an individual. He is only one of many people who are in the same situation for a myriad of reasons. I realised I could raise awareness about the fate of stateless people all around the world by writing a story that would appeal to a larger audience.

Your "day job" is not that of an author. How did you find writing a book and can you describe the process of writing up the story of Kamal?

It took me about a year to decide to actually write Kamal's story down. I had intended to work on a doctoral degree, but at a certain moment I realised that writing a work of non-fiction is more or less the same as working on a PhD. In essence, both involve doing a lot of research and write about it. And so I decided to go back to Sarajevo to interview Kamal and collect as much data as possible. In that same period I worked on an outline for a PhD, but in Sarajevo it became very clear to me that I would prefer to spend my time on this project in the years to come. I stayed in Sarajevo for ten days before returning to spend about a year on researching everything Kamal had told me. Then I enrolled in a writing class where I learned a lot about writing non-fiction from a couple of famous Dutch authors. It took me about two years to actually write the story down. The book was released in 2016 and a year later the English version came out.

What is it about the phenomenon of statelessness that particularly strikes you?

As I was writing, I came to realise that statelessness was an obstacle Kamal had to face time and again in his search for happiness and a normal life. No country, organisation or person felt in any way responsible for his situation. People who are stateless are left completely alone and cut off from the world. Statelessness is not just bad luck, not just being born in the wrong place at the wrong time. It has a lot to do with democracy and human rights and political systems. Now that I know more about it, I can clearly see that people's beliefs and convictions are a major factor and that people are deliberately excluded. Everyone should have the right to a nationality regardless of what they think and believe.

The book was recently translated from Dutch to English. Why do you think it is important to make the story accessible to a broader audience?

I have attempted to highlight the humanity of refugees and stateless people. They are often reduced to statistics, case files and quotas, while in fact they are just people like you and me. Kamal was not able to fully participate in society and millions of others are in the same situation. I notice so much indifference about the subject and something has to be done to change this. I chose to write the book in the form of a narrative, that way the story is more suitable for a broad audience. Maybe that way more people will learn more about the subject. Also, the book is not just a sad story about what it means to be stateless. Kamal has lead an exceptional life in many different places and he has witnessed many important historical events. "*A stateless Forrest Gump*", is how the reviewer of Amnesty International described Kamal. In a way it is also a beautiful story about both mental and physical borders, about love, loneliness and being a survivor.

Do you have a favourite part in the book that you can share with the readers?

That is so difficult to answer. I have gotten so involved in Kamal's life that it is difficult for me to choose. Many times I have been amazed by the choices Kamal has made. It is not random that the story starts in the middle of his life. He is 32 years old by then and finds himself in Switzerland just after his father died there. That might be my favourite chapter, because past, present and future really come together there. His youth is certainly over, he is desperate, he doesn't have any papers, or many options and just a little bit of money. That is when he has to decide what to do with his life. In hindsight, he makes a bad decision, that will have a major impact on his future.

I am also a romantic, so the passage where Kamal meets the love of his life is also a definite favourite. We went to Opatija together and we visited his past, so I actually know the place where he met her. If I close my eyes I can conjure up the setting when he kissed her for the first time and where he softly whispered "*my dreams are getting better all the time*"

The chapter I wrote about his time as a shepherd is another favourite because of the deep misery of that time. It paints the picture of the situation one man can end up in when he has no rights and when people around him abuse that situation to make a profit for themselves.

One final favourite is the epilogue, because Kamal took me by surprise once more with a decision he made that completely turned his life around again.

For more information, go to: www.gerardvanleeuwen.com

'Stateless' is now available on Amazon as hard copy and e-reader at: getBook.at/stateless

Contribute to the Statelessness Monthly Bulletin via
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