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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

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Industries Caucus

January 20, 2006

The Honorable Ellen Sauerbrey  
Assistant Secretary of State for  
Population Refugees and Migration  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey:

Congratulations on your appointment. As you start as the Director of the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), I hope that you will recognize and seek to address the needs of stateless persons. These are people without a recognized citizenship, who are thereby often deprived of a host of basic human rights. Stateless persons are a highly vulnerable group that is largely ignored and too often falls between the cracks of government bureaucracies, but which ought to be among the primary concerns of your bureau. Millions of stateless persons, especially those who are not also refugees, continue to be overlooked to an unacceptable degree by the U.S. and many other countries.

Statelessness continues to be a fundamental cause of discrimination, exploitation, and forced displacement in all regions of the world. As documented in a recent Refugees International report, "Lives on Hold," some 11 million stateless persons in the world are largely neglected in the international system. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has the mandate for protecting stateless persons and seeking resolutions to their lack of citizenship, but the agency and its donors have given limited attention to this mandate.

In Bangladesh, for example, the status of 250,000 stateless Biharis (also called stranded Pakistanis) has been in suspended animation for over thirty years. The primary need of these individuals is either to be permitted to go "home" to Pakistan or to obtain citizenship in Bangladesh. In the meantime, they reside in the same "temporary" camps they have occupied for decades, where conditions are harsh and becoming worse. Refugees International found accommodations throughout the sixty-six camps they inhabit to be severely overcrowded, clearly unhygienic, and unsafe. In one case, over 200 people were left homeless when fire swept through one of the camps. Some camps have no education or medical facilities and the Government of Bangladesh has cut off regular food assistance. The right to a nationality is a human right, and for thirty-three years these individuals have waited for a resolution.

I encourage PRM to establish within the Bureau a full-time focal point on statelessness

who would monitor protection of stateless populations in a manner similar to the efforts undertaken for refugees and guide the Bureau to provide substantial new resources to both UN and non-governmental agency work on behalf of stateless persons. PRM should work closely with your counterparts in the Bureau on Human Rights, Democracy and Labor to include specific sections on stateless populations in the annual country reports on human rights. I would also hope that PRM's resettlement processing priorities will explicitly reference stateless persons (and we applaud PRM for recognizing and resettling Meskhetian Turks—members of one such stateless community).

Preventing statelessness and protecting individuals without citizenship are matters of basic human rights that have been dangerously abrogated. The prevention and reduction of statelessness contributes not only to the promotion of human rights, improved quality of life for affected individuals, and increased overall human security, but also aids in the reduction of forced displacement, human trafficking, and refugee flows.

I look forward to working with your bureau to reduce the global problem of statelessness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane E. Watson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Diane E. Watson  
Member of Congress