



Thailand's Commitment to Accelerating Citizenship Granting: A Step Toward Dignity and Inclusion of the Stateless

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Nationality For All (NFA), and the Statelessness and Dignified Citizenship Coalition Asia Pacific (SDCC-AP) welcome Thailand's decision published on November 4, 2024 to accelerate the process of granting citizenship and provide legal status to approximately 480,000 long-term residents of Thailand. The Ministry of Interior is set to implement these new regulations within the next 30-60 days.¹ This decision puts to action Thailand's commitment to expedite the nationality acquisition of a large group of population by providing them with legal documentation and reducing the processing time from 270 days to 5 days. The simplified verification procedures through self-declaration, decentralised approval authority between the central government and provincial areas and streamlined documentation requirements will greatly improve the processing times. This is important because until now, the individuals whose applications have been submitted for consideration of legal determination have been waiting in limbo to get access to legal status. This demonstrates the Thai government's commitment to addressing statelessness and ensuring that every person within its borders has the opportunity to live with dignity, security, and equal access to rights.

Thailand has one of the largest populations of stateless individuals, with the Ministry of Interior confirming 592,430 individuals who are registered as stateless.² The reasons for statelessness in Thailand are multifold, with primary causes being administrative barriers in obtaining citizenship, discriminatory distribution of citizenship across different ethnicities. Highlanders and children of labour migrants in Thailand are most impacted and are impacted by statelessness because of discrimination. Citizenship is not just a legal status but a cornerstone of identity, belonging, and access to fundamental human rights. For the individuals affected, many of whom have been living in legal limbo for decades, this decision represents hope for a future where they can fully participate in society, gain access to education, healthcare, and employment, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

As organisations dedicated to promoting justice, equality, and the well-being of vulnerable populations, we believe that Thailand's decision will significantly improve the lives of stateless individuals, many of whom belong to marginalised ethnic groups and have faced years of systemic exclusion. While we commend the government for taking this bold step which directly impacts approximately 480,000 individuals, there are many others who remain left out and need consideration in determining their status. Hundreds of thousands of individuals still lack access to citizenship, largely due to insufficient documentation, lack of identification, and limited legal awareness within the system.

ADRA, NFA, and SDCC-AP have been involved in working with individuals without access to citizenship and addressing the challenges faced by marginalised populations. Through our programs, we have seen firsthand how the lack of citizenship creates barriers to education, livelihood opportunities, and social inclusion. We are committed to continuing our efforts to support these

¹ Thailand Government Public Relations Department, 'Thai Cabinet Approves Expedited Citizenship for Long-Term Residents' (*Government Public Relations Department*)

<<https://thailand.prd.go.th/en/content/category/detail/id/52/iid/337097>> accessed 22 November 2024.

² UNICEF and UNHCR Urge Urgent Action to End Childhood Statelessness' (*UNICEF Thailand*, 8 October 2024)

<<https://www.unicef.org/thailand/press-releases/unicef-and-unhcr-urge-urgent-action-end-childhood-statelessness>> accessed 22 November 2024.



communities and work alongside the Thai government, civil society, and other stakeholders in implementing this decision.

ADRA, NFA, and SDCC-AP also recognize that this decision reflects a growing regional and global momentum toward resolving statelessness. In solidarity with the stateless and marginalised persons, we remain dedicated to advocating for the rights and dignity of all people, regardless of nationality or legal status. We look forward to supporting the implementation of this policy and ensuring that it leads to meaningful, lasting change in the lives of those it impacts.

About ADRA

ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) is the global humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. With a presence in over 130 countries, ADRA seeks to improve the quality of life of vulnerable populations through community-based development initiatives and emergency relief, regardless of ethnic, political, or religious affiliation.

About NFA

Nationality For All (NFA) is a regional organisation working to promote the right to nationality and address statelessness in the Asia Pacific region. NFA works closely with stateless persons, persons affected by statelessness, grassroots organisations, activists, and national NGOs. NFA aspires to increase the proximity to power of persons with lived experience of statelessness through their meaningful participation in the statelessness ecosystem.

About SDCC-AP

Statelessness and Dignified Citizenship Coalition Asia Pacific (SDCC-AP) is a regional coalition of civil society organisations and activists working together to address statelessness and ensure the right to nationality for all in the Asia Pacific region. SDCC-AP works on mainstreaming statelessness in the Asia Pacific and its scope comprises solidarity building, peer learning, capacity strengthening, and advocacy.