



Erased: From Citizen to Statelessness

The Human Cost of Denationalization in Kuwait

JANUARY 2026





Introduction

Since early 2024, Kuwaiti society has been undergoing a far-reaching process of *social and demographic engineering*, manifested in an unprecedented campaign to revoke and withdraw citizenship. This campaign has unfolded alongside major political shifts—most notably the dissolution of the National Assembly and the suspension of certain constitutional provisions on 10 May 2024—moves that effectively expanded executive authority over an issue long regarded as politically untouchable. Led by the Supreme Committee for Nationality Verification, chaired by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, the campaign had, by August 2025, affected more than 50,000 individuals—approximately 3.33 percent of Kuwait's citizen population of 1.5 million. This scale represents a significant demographic shock, abruptly rendering thousands of families stateless and fundamentally altering the country's social fabric.

This report seeks to provide a comprehensive legal and human rights analysis of the measures adopted, assess their conformity with the Kuwaiti Constitution and the State's international obligations, and document the severe humanitarian consequences inflicted on affected individuals and families.

1. Historical and Political Context

The current crisis of citizenship revocation in Kuwait cannot be understood in isolation from the country's historical conception of citizenship itself. From its inception, Kuwaiti nationality law has been built on a legally entrenched hierarchy that distinguishes between so-called "original citizens" (Article 1—those present in Kuwait prior to 1920) and "naturalized" citizens. This framework has, from the outset, vested the executive branch with sweeping discretionary powers over the granting, denial, and withdrawal of nationality, treating citizenship as a *state-conferred privilege* rather than an inherent right. Over the decades, nationality has repeatedly been instrumentalized as a tool of social and political control. Yet the current campaign marks a qualitative departure, both in its reliance on modern technologies—most notably DNA testing—and in its explicit political orientation toward reducing the citizen population on economic and security grounds.



In Kuwait's rentier welfare system, citizenship is not just a legal status—it is an economic charter that unlocks publicsector jobs, housing benefits, and state subsidies. Because wealth and nationality are structurally intertwined, naturalization has long been tightly restricted. By contrast, revoking citizenship amounts to economic and social obliteration: it strips individuals not only of legal identity but of their place within the social contract itself.

The intensified campaign of citizenship withdrawal is directly tied to the political changes introduced by Emir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In May 2024, he dissolved the National Assembly and suspended key constitutional provisions for up to four years, citing flaws in democratic practice and threats to the state's "supreme interests." This move eliminated parliamentary oversight—the main check on executive power—allowing the government to amend the Nationality Law and the Law on Foreign Residence through decree-laws, without public debate or legislative review.

To justify the sweeping revocation of citizenship, the government has promoted a narrative of "protecting national identity" from alleged "infiltrators" and "forgers." Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad AlYousef has insisted that "no one is above the law," portraying the campaign as an effort to cleanse nationality records. Framed as an anticorruption drive, this rhetoric has won partial support among segments of socalled "original" citizens. Yet it has also widened social divides and entrenched a climate of fear and suspicion, where questioning the origins and legitimacy of fellow citizens has become routine—and often actively encouraged.





2. Legislative Framework and Legal Analysis

Kuwait's current campaign relies on a mix of old statutes applied with unusual severity and new legislative amendments that expand executive powers. The core legal issue lies in turning exceptional provisions into general rules for mass application. Central to this is **Amiri Decree No. 15 of 1959**, reactivated and amended in 2024 through decreelaws issued without parliamentary oversight. These changes gave the government sweeping discretion, making nationality revocation faster, broader, and enforced with unprecedented rigor.

A key distinction often blurred in public discourse is between **loss of nationality** and **revocation/withdrawal**—terms with different legal bases and consequences.

Issue	Loss of Nationality	Revocation (Discretionary)	Revocation (Fraud)
Legal Article	Article 11 (1959 Law)	Article 13	Article 21 bis (A)
Nature of Measure	Administrative (claimed non-punitive)	Punitive	Punitive
Main Reason	Alleged voluntary acquisition of another nationality	"Supreme interest of the State," acts deemed harmful to national security, or promotion of principles allegedly undermining the social order	Alleged fraud or false information
Application in Practice	Loss imposed based on "indications" of dual nationality, without proving voluntary choice or formal renunciation	Vague criteria, widely used against political opponents and activists; no court ruling required, only administrative discretion	"Fraud" broadly defined to include non-disclosure of past nationality or use of DNA to deny lineage



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Judicial Oversight	None in practice	None	None
Retroactive Effect	Yes — often decades	Article 13	Article 21 bis (A)
Nature of Measure	Administrative (claimed non-punitive)	No	Yes
Impact on Family Members	Children and grandchildren retroactively stripped of citizenship	Citizenship may be withdrawn from all dependents	Entire family line erased from civil records
Social Consequences	Families reclassified as non-Kuwaiti overnight	Collective punishment across generations	Denial of legally and religiously established lineage
Scale of Current Use	Thousands of alleged dual nationals targeted	Widely used against critics and activists	Increasingly used in lineage cases

In the absence of parliament, the government issued **DecreeLaw No. 116 of 2024**, introducing major amendments to the Nationality Law.

- **Repeal of Article 8 (Naturalization of Wives):** Foreign women married to Kuwaiti men can no longer acquire nationality, even if they have children. Applied retroactively,



this measure stripped thousands of widows and mothers of citizenship, entrenching gender discrimination and restricting nationality to paternal bloodlines.

- **Tougher penalties for "nationality fraud":** Individuals accused of falsifying nationality records now face criminal prosecution, imprisonment, and recovery of benefits obtained during their period of citizenship.

To mitigate the humanitarian fallout, the government enacted Decree-Law No. 158 of 2024, granting affected women special residency status and limited civil rights. However, the measure fell short of restoring nationality, relegating them from full citizens to residents reliant on state discretion—a codified form of "partial citizenship."

3. Absence of Judicial Safeguards: The Doctrine of "Acts of Sovereignty"

The most serious danger inherent in Kuwait's current nationality measures lies not only in the vagueness of the governing legal provisions, but in their effective insulation from judicial oversight. This immunity is rooted in the doctrine of "acts of sovereignty," codified in Article 1 of the Law on the Organization of the Judiciary, which excludes certain executive acts from judicial review.

Historically, Kuwaiti courts have classified nationality matters—both the granting and withdrawal of citizenship—as sovereign acts falling outside judicial jurisdiction. For decades, this doctrine shielded executive decisions on nationality from legal challenge. There were, however, limited moments of judicial progress. Most notably, in the landmark *Ahmed Al-Shammari* ruling, the Court of Cassation asserted its authority to review citizenship withdrawal decisions, recognizing nationality as an essential component of personal legal identity and rejecting the notion that administrative acts should remain immune from scrutiny when affected by serious legal defects.

This judicial trajectory was decisively reversed between 2022 and 2025. In a pivotal ruling issued in 2022, the General Panel of the Court of Cassation entrenched a sweeping principle: all nationality matters—whether original or acquired—fall entirely outside judicial competence. The Court affirmed that the State enjoys absolute discretion in determining who belongs to it. This ruling effectively dismantled the limited safeguards that had previously allowed for judicial intervention.



The implications were profound. By removing nationality decisions from judicial oversight, the ruling provided the executive branch with full legal cover for the expansive citizenship revocation campaign carried out in 2024–2025. Freed from the risk of judicial annulment or accountability, the authorities were emboldened to broaden the scope, scale, and retroactive application of revocations.

Consequences of Judicial Exclusion

The entrenchment of the "acts of sovereignty" doctrine has produced severe and systemic consequences:

- **Absence of legal remedy:** Individuals stripped of their nationality—whether arbitrarily, retroactively, or on the basis of factual or legal error—are denied access to any independent judicial body to challenge the decision.
- **Concentration of power in the executive:** The Supreme Committee for Nationality Affairs effectively functions as investigator, prosecutor, and decision-maker simultaneously, in clear violation of basic principles of due process and the right to a fair hearing.

This absolute immunity places Kuwait's nationality practices in direct conflict with its international obligations, particularly the duty to guarantee access to justice and effective remedies for violations of fundamental rights.

The Grievance Committee: Administrative, Not Judicial

In response to growing domestic and international criticism, the Council of Ministers issued Decision No. 207 of 2025 establishing a "Grievance Committee on Nationality Loss and Revocation." While the creation of this body was presented as a corrective measure, its structure and mandate fall far short of constituting an effective remedy.

The committee is purely administrative in nature and operates under the authority of the same executive branch responsible for issuing nationality withdrawal decisions. It lacks institutional independence and does not meet minimum standards of judicial or quasi-judicial review. Its procedures rely primarily on electronic submissions and provide no guarantees of oral hearings, disclosure of evidence, reasoned decisions,



or the right to legal representation.

Monitoring conducted by *Women Journalists Without Chains* has, to date, identified no meaningful cases in which nationality was restored through this mechanism. This raises serious concerns that the committee functions less as a genuine avenue for redress and more as a procedural façade intended to deflect criticism while preserving the substance of executive control.



4. Human Rights Violations and International Obligations

Kuwait's citizenship-revocation campaign places the State in direct conflict with its international human rights obligations, amounting to a systematic pattern of violations. Kuwait has been a State party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) since 1996 and to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) since 1991, both of which impose binding duties relevant to nationality, due process, and non-discrimination.

- **Right to Nationality and the Prohibition of Statelessness**

Although Kuwait is not a party to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions, Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and rules of customary international



law impose a clear obligation to avoid actions that result in statelessness. The current campaign has rendered thousands stateless, either because individuals had formally renounced their original nationality upon naturalization or because they possessed no other nationality, including previously naturalized Bidoon.

The impact is intergenerational. Under the principle of dependency, revoking the nationality of the head of household automatically deprives children of citizenship, creating a cascading effect that reproduces statelessness across generations. Rather than resolving the longstanding Bidoon crisis, these measures risk entrenching it further by generating a new class of stateless persons.

- **Violation of Fair Trial Guarantees (Articles 14 and 24 ICCPR)**

Current practices also violate core ICCPR guarantees, most notably Article 14 (the right to a fair trial) and Article 24 (the right of every child to acquire a nationality). Citizenship revocations are carried out by the Supreme Committee for Nationality Affairs through closed administrative procedures, often based on undisclosed security reports. Affected individuals are not informed of the evidence against them, nor are they afforded the opportunity to contest allegations or present a defense before a decision is issued. The subsequent publication of names in the Official Gazette transforms revocation into an irreversible fait accompli, in clear breach of due process and the right to an effective remedy.

- **Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**

The targeting of women who acquired nationality through marriage constitutes a serious violation of Article 9 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Revoking nationality retroactively following divorce or widowhood reduces women's legal status to their marital relationship and denies them independent legal personality. Even accounting for Kuwait's reservation to Article 9, the current campaign exceeds any permissible limitation, reversing prior protections. Women's files are subjected to retroactive scrutiny, and nationality is withdrawn on vague grounds such as "loss of interest" or "instability of the marital bond," standards not applied equally to men. This places women in a condition of permanent legal insecurity.



- **Political Rights and Freedom of Expression (Articles 19 and 25 ICCPR)**

Authorities have relied on Article 13 of the Nationality Law, invoking the "supreme interest of the State," to penalize political opponents, including intellectuals, politicians, and former members of parliament. [The use of nationality revocation](#) as a punitive response to dissent constitutes a grave violation of freedom of expression and political participation, reinforcing a climate of intimidation and suppressing legitimate civic engagement.

5. Documented Case Studies (2024–2025)

The following cases illustrate systematic patterns of nationality revocation in Kuwait and their legal and humanitarian consequences:

- **Tareq AlSuwaidan – December 2025**

- **Action:** [Nationality revoked](#) for him and several family members.
- **Legal Basis:** Not officially stated.
- **Observations:** No formal explanation was published. Reports indicate political positions and ideological affiliation, though officially unconfirmed. Family members were affected, creating legal uncertainty and potential statelessness. [Using nationality as a political weapon](#) gravely violates freedom of expression and intimidates activists.



- **Mohammed Hussein AlMuhan AlAjmi**

– November 2025

- **Action:** Former MP and opposition bloc member [stripped of](#) nationality along with seven relatives.
- **Legal Basis:** Article 21 bis (fraud and





falsification), following the withdrawal of his mother's citizenship.

- **Observations:** The revocation affected multiple family members, including children, creating legal and social vulnerability. Timing and scope correlate with his parliamentary activity, though official reasoning was not provided. Elected public figures were stripped of citizenship, impacting political representation.

- **Salman AlKhalidi – April 2024**

- **Action:** Nationality revoked by Amiri decree under Article 13; in absentia prison sentences issued.

- **Observations:** Subsequently arrested in early 2025 during a visit to Iraq through regional security cooperation. The revocation severed access to homeland and family, exemplifying transnational enforcement of nationality withdrawal and restriction of civil and personal rights.



- **Nawal AlKuwaitiya and Dawood Hussein – Late 2024**



- **Action:** Nationality withdrawn.
- **Legal Basis:** Previously acquired under "distinguished service" category.
- **Observations:** The measure signals an attempt to re-engineer cultural identity



along ethnic lines, conveying that cultural contributions no longer safeguard naturalized citizens. It exposed them to smear campaigns and online harassment driven by hate speech questioning their belonging.

- **Salwa AlSayed – March 2025**

- **Action:** Arrested, nationality revoked under Article 8 following divorce, and deported immediately.
- **Observations:** Children were left behind. Revocation followed her public remarks in a Twitter Space about personal identity and attachment to nationality. Legal procedures were limited or absent, illustrating a collapse of fair trial guarantees and forced exile as a mechanism of nationality management.

Observed Patterns and Consequences

- **Family-wide impact:** Revocations frequently affect children and relatives, creating intergenerational statelessness.
- **Legal uncertainty:** Individuals lose citizenship status with minimal or no access to due process.
- **Forced displacement and separation:** Some cases involve deportation and separation from family members.
- **Retroactive and extended effect:** Revocations sometimes apply decades after naturalization, affecting dependents and descendants.
- **Humanitarian consequences:** Thousands of families experience statelessness, social exclusion, and economic precarity, resulting in long-term intergenerational vulnerability.



6. Humanitarian and Social Consequences: "Civil Death" and the Making of New Bidoon

The impact of nationality revocation in Kuwait extends far beyond the loss of a passport. It creates a condition of "**civil death**"—the stripping of all civil and political rights, rendering individuals legally invisible. This reality is enforced through the *Security Block* system, which immediately paralyzes daily life once a revocation order is issued.

Victims recount [harrowing experiences](#): inability to register a relative's death, renew a driver's license, or even fill a medical prescription. Public figures such as Dawood Hussein and Nawal AlKuwaitiya face additional humiliation through defamation campaigns [branding them "fraudulent,"](#) erasing their professional and social legacy. Children of those stripped of nationality suffer existential anxiety, expulsion from schools, and bullying, [violating their right to](#) healthy psychological and social development.

- **Loss of Legal Personality:** Once a decree is published in the Official Gazette, the individual is reclassified as an "illegal resident" (*Bidoon*). Civil IDs are cancelled, blocking access to essential services such as registering births, marriages, or divorces. Under DecreeLaw No. 114 of 2024 on foreign residency, they face constant risk of arrest or deportation. Without another passport, many are trapped inside Kuwait, vulnerable



to indefinite detention in deportation centers—contravening the right to recognition before the law.

- **Economic Strangulation:** Revocation triggers immediate dismissal from public sector jobs, often without severance or pensions, leaving families destitute overnight. Banks, following Central Bank directives and KYC rules, freeze accounts and credit cards, while debts remain enforceable. Many face lawsuits and arrest warrants for unpaid loans, plunging them into cycles of debt and imprisonment. Limited exceptions announced in late 2024 for some women under Article 8 do not cover the majority of cases.
- **Segregation in Basic Rights - Health and Education:** Essential services shift from constitutional entitlements to inaccessible commodities. Health insurance cards are cancelled, excluding individuals from free public healthcare and forcing them into unaffordable private treatment—effectively a slow death for those with chronic illnesses. In education, children are expelled from public schools and scholarships abroad are terminated, destroying years of study and condemning a new generation to poverty and marginalization.
- **Family Breakdown and Social Stigma:** Beyond material loss, families endure severe social stigma. Official and media narratives portray them as "fraudsters" or "infiltrators," driving social isolation and exposing children to bullying. Reports highlight cases of forced or "strategic" divorce, where spouses separate to protect children's nationality or to distance themselves from a husband branded as "fraudulent," fearing the repercussions of revocation. Children grow up torn between their former identity and new exclusion, carrying deep psychological scars that endure across generations.
- **The Creation of New Bidoon:** Current measures are producing a new stateless class. Files are transferred to the Central Agency for Illegal Residents, the body managing the *Bidoon*. The state deploys technological and social tools—DNA testing as a "biological" criterion for citizenship, digital revocation notices via the *Sahel* app, and hotlines encouraging citizens to report one another—reproducing the historic *Bidoon* tragedy on a wider scale.

7. Urgent Recommendations

The ongoing nationality-revocation campaign in Kuwait constitutes a grave human



rights and humanitarian crisis. *Women Journalists Without Chains* issues the following urgent recommendations to halt violations, protect victims, and restore the rule of law.



Urgent Recommendations

1) Kuwaiti Government: Immediate Action Required

Suspend all revocations

Freeze all nationality withdrawals and halt Supreme Committee operations until criteria comply with the Constitution and international human rights law.

Protect affected families

Maintain access to public services, education, healthcare, and employment; unfreeze accounts and restructure debts to prevent economic collapse.

End retroactive measures

Protect the legal status and rights of women, children, and families from retroactive legislation.

Prevent statelessness

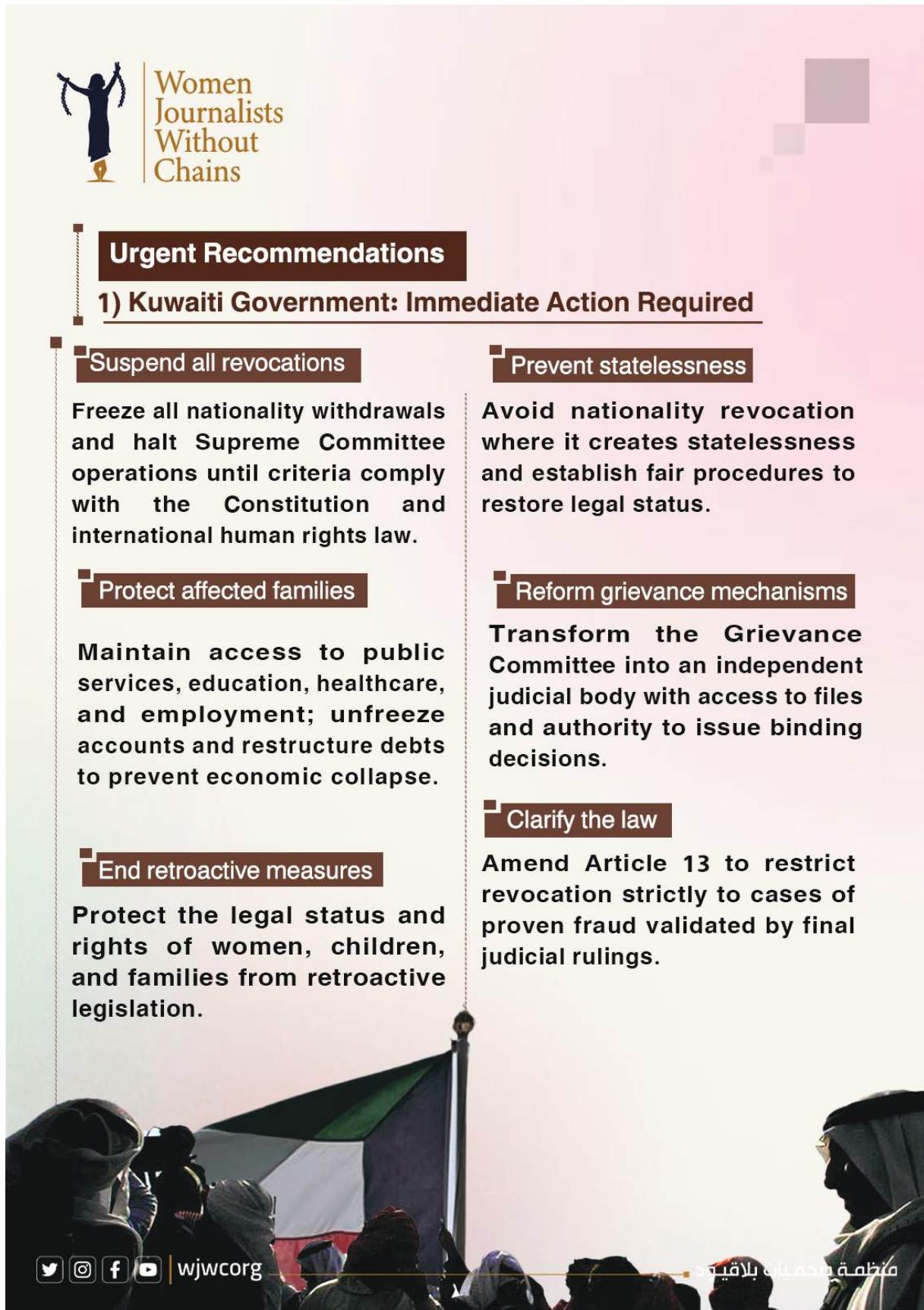
Avoid nationality revocation where it creates statelessness and establish fair procedures to restore legal status.

Reform grievance mechanisms

Transform the Grievance Committee into an independent judicial body with access to files and authority to issue binding decisions.

Clarify the law

Amend Article 13 to restrict revocation strictly to cases of proven fraud validated by final judicial rulings.





2) Judiciary and Constitutional Court: Restore Oversight

■ Abandon the "Acts of Sovereignty" Doctrine

Reverse the principle excluding nationality matters from judicial review. Nationality should be recognized as a constitutional right that cannot be revoked administratively without judicial oversight, consistent with Article 166 of the Constitution guaranteeing access to justice for all.



3) International Community and UN Mechanisms: Apply Pressure and Support

Diplomatic Pressure

Partner states and regional organizations should raise arbitrary nationality deprivation in bilateral and multilateral dialogues, linking it to Kuwait's broader human rights record.

UNHCR Engagement

Activate mechanisms to protect individuals rendered de facto stateless, ensuring registration, documentation, and legal safeguards.

UN Special Procedures

Relevant UN Special Rapporteurs, particularly on migrants' rights and minority issues, should request country visits to assess and report on the situation.

NGO monitoring

Continue systematic monitoring and documentation of violations while providing legal, social, and moral support to affected individuals and families.





4) Civil Society and Activists: Record and Advocate

Building Legal Case Files

Document each nationality revocation individually and with precision (case by case documentation), focusing on procedural violations. These records should be prepared for use in strategic litigation before international courts or UN treaty bodies (such as the Human Rights Committee under the ICCPR), once domestic remedies have been exhausted—or demonstrably proven ineffective.

