



An Appeal to Host a Ukrainian Family

Ukrainians who have been displaced by the current conflict in Ukraine war have not been designated as refugees by the Canadian federal government. As a consequence of this decision, the Archdiocese of Toronto is not able to sponsor Ukrainians through Canada’s Private Sponsorship of Refugee’s program. Instead, Canadians are asked to consider hosting Ukrainian families who have arrived to Canada under the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) program. With over 100,000 having already arrived, most arriving to Toronto, and with an additional 500,000 who have applied to the program and who are expected to arrive in the coming months, the need is great.

There is also a significant concern that some who are arriving, who do not have family here in Canada to help them, will be particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, especially seniors, single women, and women with children. The need for Canadians to host is even more urgent when considering Toronto’s tight rental market and the absence of adequate government supports.

It is important to note that the hosting program is distinct from the refugee sponsorship program, in which a parish community enters into a legal agreement with Immigration Canada to settle a refugee family over the course of 12 months. Instead, the hosting program takes its inspiration from Poland’s response to the millions of Ukrainians fleeing the conflict zone, where Polish citizens opened their homes to those who have fled. In this case, the host determines the type of family that they are able to host and the duration of the hosting situation.

While ORAT is not able to offer its own hosting program, we would like to inform you via a virtual webinar about the various aspects of hosting. At the conclusion of the webinar we will be directing you to contact a Non-Governmental-Organization (NGO) that is undertaking this work.

If you would like to learn more about hosting, please click [here](#) and provide your name and contact information on the form. An email will be sent to you inviting you to attend a virtual information session on hosting.



IRCC Delayed in Issuing Application Numbers (G Numbers)

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has been overwhelmed with responding to the Afghan refugee crisis and to those displaced by the war in Ukraine. This has caused considerable delays in processing the Private Sponsorship applications and has resulted in a substantial delay IRCC’s issuance of application numbers (G#) for the submitted cases.

Please note that ORAT has submitted all of its 2022 cases to Immigration Canada.

We ask all cosponsors to be patient as we wait for the IRCC to issue the application numbers. We have reached out to IRCC asking for an update on G numbers. We will update cosponsors and constituent group (CGs) as soon as an update is available from IRCC.

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Public Session 2023

Each year, ORAT sets aside a certain part of its annual allocation for members of the General Public who would like to sponsor a family member(s) who is in need of refugee resettlement. This program is not intended for cosponsors who are parishioners of Catholic parishes in the Archdiocese of Toronto, or of Eastern Rite Catholic or Orthodox Churches, with whom ORAT has developed a specific program for active members of their community.

We plan to announce information about how to register for the Public Session towards the end of this year or early part of 2023. We encourage all those who are interested in participating in this program to monitor our website for further information. Please click [here](#) to access our website.



Update on the Operation Afghan Safety (“OAS”)

The OAS program was developed by Immigration Canada in response to the unfolding refugee crisis in Afghanistan. It allows Sponsorship Agreement Holders to sponsor Afghan nationals who have been forced to flee their homeland and who fall into one of the following six categories: Persecuted Religious Minority, Human Rights Defender, Women Leader, Journalist, and members of the LGBTI community.

ORAT has responded to the Afghan crisis, submitting applications to sponsor 57 Afghan refugees. Twelve of these sponsored refugees have already arrived in Toronto. On September 29, 2022, IRCC announced its [temporary public policy](#) to facilitate the sponsorship of Afghan refugees through the Groups of Five (G5), and Community Sponsorship (CS) programs. This public policy waived the requirement for the refugee to have a Refugee Status Determination (RSD) document for these programs. Sponsors need to meet the eligibility criteria in addition to completing a mandatory RSTP training specified by IRCC in relation to this public policy.

At least one member from each G5/CS sponsorship group is required to complete the training. This temporary public policy will be in effect from October 17, 2022 to October 17, 2023. Click [here](#) for further information about this public policy.

Important Note: Sponsorship Agreement Holders like ORAT are not able to assist with Groups of Five (G5) or Community Sponsorship (CS) applications. For detailed information please visit the Immigration Canada website: <https://www.cic.gc.ca/>

World Day of Migrants and Refugees

On Sunday, September 25th, the Archdiocese of Toronto marked the 108th World Day of Migrants & Refugees at St. Joseph Syriac Catholic Church, in Mississauga. Mass was celebrated, with His Eminence Thomas Cardinal Collins presiding, and Bishop Paulos Nassif giving the homily. Mass was followed by a reception.

A number of dignitaries were also present, including: Rechie Valdez, MP for Mississauga—Streetsville, Ontario, who brought greetings from the Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; Jasraj Singh Hallan, MP for Calgary Forest Lawn, Alberta., (Conservative Shadow Minister for Immigration); Rudy Cuzzetto, MPP for Mississauga-Lakeshore; Aris Babikian, MPP for Scarborough-Agincourt; and Sheref Sabawy, MPP for Mississauga-Erin Mills.

ORAT would like to extend a special thanks to Fr. Manhal Abboush and the Refugee Committee at St. Joseph Syriac Catholic Church for the wonderful job in hosting this event. Click [here](#) to view the Mass and subsequent speeches.



My Refugee Story - Samuel Josef

My name is Samuel Josef. I arrived to Canada as a sponsored refugee in 2022. My story and struggles as a persecuted Christian refugee, before arriving to Canada is emotional; but I want to share it so that others in similar conditions may have a voice, where currently there is none on the plight of Christians in Pakistan.

I lived at Joseph Colony, a Christian Community in Lahore, Pakistan. I am married to my wife, Suha since 2013; we have two beautiful sons named Mat and Ian. I worked at Lohey Ki Puli Badami Bagh, near Hajwari marriage Hall. Mr. Masih, also a resident of Joseph colony, worked in the same place with me; we both often traveled to and from work together. One day, in March 2013, when I was at work, four unknown persons suddenly approached me to ask for the whereabouts of my co-worker, Masih. I told them that I had not seen him that day. These strangers immediately became angry with me and started to beat me severely. Before I could process it, many people soon gathered there. This somehow helped release me from the beating. I quickly escaped from the scene and fled to my home. Later in March, 2013, a mob of Muslim youths descended on and burned down Joseph Colony, torching dozens of known Christian homes. Again, that same month in March, 2013, another unknown Muslim group attacked me, without any cause; my parents became concerned and decided to send me to my aunt's house, which is located in another province, Hyderabad Sindh, several kilometers from my home town.

In my absence, extremists came to my home in Lahore and beat up my parents and interrogated them to disclose my whereabouts. They threatened my parents that wherever they would find me, they would kill me, because I was an associate of a Blasphemer to their Prophet. Apparently, I was being targeted and beaten because of my workmate, Masih who was alleged to have done an act considered blasphemous, according to some extreme interpretation of Islamic law in Pakistan. By my association with Masih, I had automatically become a target, who needed to be punished for the crime of blasphemy.



Following these threats, my parents became concerned for their lives too and also fled hundreds of miles away from our home town to join me at my aunt's home. They narrated to me all the incidents that had occurred to them. My life was in danger and it was no longer safe for me and my family to stay or relocate in any part of Pakistan. After agonizing over these developments and the risks, reluctantly with heavy hearts, I and my family decided to flee from Pakistan in October, 2013 in order to save our lives. We left Pakistan and arrived to Thailand the following day.

At first, it felt a huge relief to escape away from those attempting to kill us due to an unfounded allegations, simply because of our faith as Christians in Pakistan. However, our hearts were always heavy because everything that we loved and had known all our lives was left behind in Pakistan. It was helpless not knowing what would happen to my parents and other relatives, who too were targeted by the extremists, simply because they hid me from the mobs.

In Thailand, soon it became clear that life was difficult and challenging. We had no legal status to work as asylum seekers, as our visas had expired. We had no legal protections as refugee claimants.

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My Refugee Story (cont'd)

The Thai immigration authorities do not allow persons who've overstayed their visas to live in the country. Such people are immediately rounded up, arrested and kept in crowded Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs). Conditions in the IDCs are horrible and treatment by authorities is inhumane. No human beings ought to live or be treated in that manner. However, as asylum seekers without legal protections in Thailand, we have no voice or any rights. Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention on Protection of Refugees.

My first son was born in Thailand on August, 2014, a year after we had fled to Thailand from Pakistan. The following year in March, 2015, Thai Immigration Police raided our building, where we lived and arrested my wife and our 6 month old son, while I had gone out for errands. They were detained in the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) jails. Our crime was that we had overstayed our visa, although we had by now been registered by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as refugees and had all the necessary UNHCR documents to show. This was very difficult for me and my family. Conditions in the IDC jails were terrible; my wife and our 6 month old son were treated like criminals. We could not understand why we would be treated this way. As a parent, it was the worst nightmare, having fled persecution in Pakistan, only to end up in a crowded Thai Immigration Detention Centre jail. I prayed and asked God to intervene for the sake of my 6 month old child.

While in the detention centre jail, my wife became very sick; she suffered nutritional deficiency and could not breastfeed her child. Perhaps, God heard our prayers because nearly months after my wife and son's detention, a Non-Governmental agency (NGO) that was visiting the IDCs saw the plight of my family and arranged with authorities for the release of my wife and child. When my wife was released, she was examined by doctors and diagnosed with breast cancer. This news was devastating and only amplified our suffering, especially for my wife who now needed urgent treatment for this condition. Although efforts were being made to treat her, the condition became worse day by day in Thailand. It brings tears to my eyes, each time I relive those sad experiences. We spent nine years in Thailand without any hope or a future for my children and family. We were stuck; we couldn't live in Thailand or return to Pakistan for fear of death from extremist mobs, who were seeking to kill me for blasphemy.

We lived each day in fear. We always locked up ourselves inside our rooms, afraid of being arrested by Thai Immigration Police, who conducted regular random searches of residential buildings for foreigners who are without status. Thailand is not a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Conventions, thus our refugee status documents are not recognized and do not provide protection from arrest and detention by authorities.

My child was growing older day by day. When he reached the age for going to school, I could not send him to school, or even provide proper nutrition for him and his mother for their health. We were not allowed to work, except we survived on odd jobs from Thai people who exploited our situation and we were at their mercy.

My second son, Ian was born on July, 2019. He was born with a serious medical condition that needed corrective surgery. He had to undergo 2 major surgeries in Thailand, which was very difficult for my family emotionally and financially. We are grateful that the procedure was successful, but we need to continue to take care of him on advice of the doctors until he is ten years or more. We prayed to God for protection and mercy in our difficult situation. In all this, we had no hope but faith in our God, which kept us together. Normal life for us and our children was a distant dream; our freedom and the future of my children was uncertain.



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My Refugee Story (cont'd)

In 2019, a group of people from the Office for Refugees, Archdiocese of Toronto came on mission, to witness the plight of Pakistani refugees in Bangkok, Thailand. My family, along with other refugees met with representatives of the Office for Refugees. We shared our sad stories, cried and prayed together. Although we had no hope, we were grateful that at least someone unknown to us had come to listen to our plight and condition. Their presence and prayers gave us hope and a renewed faith in our God who had kept us alive thus far.

After the Office for Refugee representatives returned to Canada, some of us in the months that followed, were informed that parishioners of the archdiocese of Toronto had heard about our suffering, as fellow Christians in Pakistan and wanted to do something about it. My family was fortunate to be matched with one of the Catholic Parishes in the Archdiocese of Toronto, who became my sponsors for resettlement to Canada, through Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP).

The application process was complicated and long but it was our only hope out of our miserable condition in Thailand. We completed different immigration forms and after they were submitted, we waited and prayed for our application process by Immigration Canada. It was emotional, when we attended our interviews and waited anxiously for a decision on our immigration resettlement application from the Canadian embassy. Everything was suddenly paused, as covid-19 restrictions were imposed by countries around the world, including Canada.

Our hope started to fade and processes were paused. We did not know, whether we would ever be approved to resettle to Canada as refugees. This was the most difficult period of our refugee journey – the long waiting period, without any news. I am grateful that members of our sponsor group in the archdiocese of Toronto kept regular communication with us via social media to encourage us not to give. We shared our fears and worries with them; they in turn offered prayers for us daily and at mass on Sundays and for covid-19 restriction to end, so that we may arrive to Canada. This went on from 2020 until 2022, when we received wonderful news that my family had been approved for resettlement to Canada.

My family arrived to Canada at the end of summer 2022. Our sponsor church community had worked hard and prepared a fully furnished apartment, with donations of in-kind items from parishioners and well-wishers, who wanted to help us feel safe and at home again. It is wonderful to know that people of God care. We are slowly trying to settle in our new community. We have a wonderful group of people in the parish that sponsored us. Each day, they help us to feel at home, showing us new things and while orienting us to our community and Canadian life. I cannot describe to you the feeling of being treated as a human being, equal with rights and freedoms in our new home, Canada. I know we still have a long way to go in adjusting to and understanding our new country. Sometimes, it still feels like a dream to be in Canada, considering that some of our relatives continue to suffer behind in Thailand and Pakistan. I think and pray for them, that their plight may receive the helping hand of Christ Jesus. Indeed, for my family, we were strangers, yet unknown to us, a parish community in the archdiocese of Toronto, welcomed us, in the name of Christ, Jesus.

Refugee Hiring Opportunity

Unlike a Career Fair, the ultimate goal of the Toronto Refugee Hiring Event is meaningful employment via action-oriented steps. Should you succeed, you will be provided either a job offer on the spot, an opportunity for a second interview, or be flagged for inclusion into further hiring processes of the employers you interview with. For more details or to reserve your seat now, click [here](#).

Catholic Crosscultural Services presents a new program to support unemployed or underemployed participants with specialized industry training and job search support.

For more information,

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