

Interview Guide

Dear Applicant,

In order to help you in the refugee sponsorship process, the Office for Refugees Archdiocese of Toronto in Canada (ORAT) has compiled this guide for your upcoming interview at the Canadian embassy, high commission, or visa post.

Preparing for the Interview

- 1) **Provide all evidence:** Submit to the embassy all evidence, proof and documents that may be important as soon as possible and in advance of the interview. Provide a copy to the ORAT. This evidence should include the following:
 - a) Your personal refugee story (including news or new developments). Please ensure to write down every issue that has resulted in your refugee status;
 - b) Potential persecution in the future;
 - c) Fate of persons in similar situation like you (for example relatives who are recognized as refugees anywhere);
 - d) Any personal identification documents;
 - e) Anything showing your problems in the country where you are right now;
 - f) Anything showing appealing medical, psychological problems;
 - g) Any new developments about your country of origin conditions; and
 - h) Anything that can establish trust and credibility.
- 2) **Arrive on time:** Make sure to arrive before the given time of your interview. You may want to travel to the location on the previous day to get familiar with how long it will take to travel to the location. Please consider traffic jams and other possible delays, keeping in mind that you should not be late. Please note that once you arrive, you may have to wait some time for your turn, so it might be wise to have some snacks, water, etc. with you.
- 3) **Dress well:** Dress in a way that shows respect. They will assume that you are a person in need, so they will not expect you to have expensive clothing. As such, there is no need to spend money on buying clothes for the interview.
- 4) **Cell phone:** It is better if you do not have a cell phone or any other electronic device with you. But should you insist on bringing it with you, make sure that the device is turned off for the interview.
- 5) **Review all documents:** Read and be familiar with every form and document that you submitted with your sponsorship application. Remember that one of the most common reasons for rejection is inconsistency, which means facts given in the interview differ from information that you provided on the various forms and documents.
- 6) **It is not good to come up with new issues at the interview**
- 7) **Correct any errors in advance:** If you find that you made a mistake on any of the forms previously submitted, it will be important for you to send a corrected version with an explanation to ORAT and the embassy immediately.
- 8) **What to bring to the interview:** Bring to the interview the originals of every document, every piece of proof that shows the persecution you faced in your country, including proof that is specific to you as well as articles and internet reports about how other people like yourself are treated in your country.

- a) Missing documents: It is acceptable to if you are not able to provide a required document but you must clearly explain why.
- b) Additional documents: If you are bringing documents with you that you could not submit prior to the interview, you can submit them along with an explanation as to why you could not submit them prior to the interview.
- 9) Practice: Practice how you would answer various questions that may be asked during the interview. You may want to practice with someone who will act as the interviewer.
- 10) Working with an interpreter: If you will be using an interpreter, it would be a good idea to practice with someone who would act as the interpreter. When using an interpreter, you should provide your answer in short segments so the interpreter will be able to translate every word you say. Interpreters are usually not allowed to summarize your comments.

The Interview:

- 1) Present all the relevant facts: Do not be afraid to state the full facts and issues to the officer. The officer will need to know what you are afraid of and why. Answer the questions in a direct, straightforward, simple, and focused manner way. If possible start your answer with a simple 'yes' or 'no', then explain further, if needed.
- 2) Do not leave the interview without saying everything that you need to say about the danger facing you. If you fail to fully state the dangers facing you, then you cannot blame the officer if they miss it. It is not the officer's job to prove your case for you or to dig around to get the information from you. You must be very clear about what you are afraid of and why. Do not assume that the officer knows something that is obvious for you: you have to tell everything what you expect from the officer to know.
- 3) Other family members: Sometimes it might happen that family members face different dangers than the principal applicant. For example, different dangers might face the men in the family compared to the women; or the children compared to the adults. Make sure that the dangers facing each family member are clearly stated to the officer.
- 4) Do not exaggerate your story: Stick to the plain truth, even if it sounds too simple. Your story does not have to be perfect in order to be accepted.
- 5) Do not allow the officer or the interpreter to put words in your mouth: If the officer says restates your answer in a manner that is wrong or not completely accurate, do not be afraid to politely, but firmly correct the officer and put the record straight. Do not say yes, just to agree with someone.
- 6) Make eye contact with the interviewer: Do not to be afraid to look the Canadian Migration Officer in the eye during the interview. Try to look at the officer during the interview, not at the interpreter. The interpreter is there just as a helper. The main person that you want to convince that you are credible is the officer. Do not look down when you talk, except if there is an emotional moment. Try to speak clearly and shortly.
- 7) Ask clarifying questions: If you do not understand a question, please ask for clarification. You may want to say that there may be a problem with the translation and that you do not understand the question.
- 8) Be truthful: Do not be afraid to speak truthfully in front of the interpreter, no matter what their religion, culture or background is. The interpreter's role is simply to help you and the officer understand one another. The interpreter does not influence the decision of the officer in any way.

- 9) Correcting the interpreter: If you happen to notice that the interpreter has made a mistake, please correct it right away so that the misunderstanding does not get worse. Do not ignore the mistake thinking that it would be rude to interrupt, or that it is only a small mistake.
- 10) Requesting a new interpreter: There may be rare situations, when an interpreter does not interpret well (e.g., the interpreter does not speak your dialect), you must indicate your concern immediately. Politely but firmly state your concern and request another interpreter. The best situation is if the interpreter also confirms that s/he cannot fully understand you.
- 11) Payment: You do not pay the interpreter. The interpreter is paid by the Canadian Government. If anybody in the sponsorship process ask money or any favor from you, please contact ORAT immediately.

Connect your story to the legal definition of a refugee

- a) Always remember the legal definition of a refugee that the officer will be applying to your case:

A Convention refugee is a person who, by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race (included ethnicity), religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group (for example gender related problems) or political opinion, is outside each of their countries of nationality (if you are citizen of more than one country) and is unable or, by reason of that fear, unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of each of those countries

Therefore it is crucially important to show how your persecution is connected to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Fear of general violence, financial or employment related issues, or problems that is not connected to any of the things outlined above, usually will not lead to positive decision. Your fear has to be connected to the legal definition, but it also has to be very personal, very individual.

The refugee definition is forward-looking. That means it doesn't matter if anything happened to you before - the important thing is what may happen in the future. The standard is "a serious possibility", meaning it's not necessary to prove a 100% certainty of persecution but only a serious possibility that it will happen.

Proof of how other people in a similar situation to you are treated in your country is very important. Therefore if other people like yourself are persecuted, this information is very important.

It is also very important to show the officer why you cannot go somewhere else inside your own country in order to be safe. When assessing this point, the officer will not care about small things such as whether you have family or can find a job or an apartment in the new area – instead the officer will be looking at whether you can physically go to this area and if you will be persecuted there.

It is necessary to prove that the authorities in your own country are not able or not willing to protect you. Therefore it is very important to show the officer what attempts (if any) you have made to get protection, and also any articles or examples of cases which show the government does not protect you, or people in your/ similar situation.

If there is proof that the authorities, the government in your country of origin do not help people in similar situation like yours, it may not be necessary to show that you tried to get protection when you reasonably thought that it would be hopeless or even dangerous. In that case we need to show the evidence of this problem: report, newspaper article, publication, and so on.

After the Interview:

- 1) Let the ORAT know immediately if at the interview, a document that you wanted to submit was not allowed.
- 2) After the interview, if you have any doubt that you were not 100% successful, or if you did not receive the medical forms, please provide the following information to ORAT:
 - a) Factual summary of the interview from the moment you entered in the building; detailed description of everything, included every question and answer.
 - b) Give an explanation of what you think went wrong, why, and how to correct it.
 - c) Even after the interview, if you have any new documents, please submit them to ORAT.

If you have any question, please contact ORAT at: oratrefugeeoffice@archtoronto.org

We wish you all the best for the interview and we hope that with this little guideline you will have a successful meeting with the immigration officer!

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