



An Update on Immigration Canada’s Allocation to SAHs

In July 2020, Immigration Canada announced their allocation to each Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) organization across Canada. While Immigration Canada’s announcement of SAH allocations was delayed for several months, the Archdiocese of Toronto’s Office for Refugees (ORAT) was pleased when it received a larger than anticipated number of spots, enabling us to sponsor over 130 additional refugees than we were able to sponsor in 2019. This is indeed wonderful news! As the year draws to a close, we are pleased to announce that we have completed the submission of all refugee sponsorship applications for this year.

Our office has already begun work to prepare for the 2021 submission period. We have held several virtual “Introduction to Resettlement” information sessions, and those that attended have started the work to complete the necessary forms to submit to our office for our review and assessment. We look forward to a fruitful 2021, enabling us to help many more refugees.

ORAT’s Advocacy Work Continues



Deacon Rudy Ovcjak, the Director of ORAT, and members of the Catholic Refugees Sponsorship Council (CRSC), including Brian Dwyer, Rabea Allos, and Diane Dicks, recently met with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the Honourable Marco Mendicino. This provided ORAT and the CRSC with a unique opportunity to extend its thanks to the Minister for the ongoing support of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program and for the resumption of refugee travel to Canada, which was halted for a time during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also provided an

opportunity to discuss with the Minister several areas of concern, including:

The High Cost of Refugee Resettlement: It is important to note that the 2018 SAH Agreement introduced a new standard of financial support for refugees, which was significantly higher than what was previously required. The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) and RAP Policy is now the current standard of financial support for refugees. The increased cost of refugee sponsorship was particularly felt by cosponsors, many of whom were recent immigrants to Canada. It was RAP Policy, and in particular the creation of the Adult Dependent Category that marked the most significant change. While IRCC defined a family as a mother, father and dependent children under the age of 22, the new Adult Dependent category required that any dependent child between the ages of 18-21 be supported at the equivalent rate of a single adult. In the case of a family of four, where two of the children

were between the ages of 18-21, the cost of sponsorship doubled from \$28,700 to \$57,800. We urged the Minister to lower the cost of refugee sponsorship and to consider removing RAP Policy from all PSR applications.

Christian Persecution: We also expressed our concern about the unprecedented level of persecution against Christians that is taking place in many parts of the world, and of the lack of action taken by western governments to address

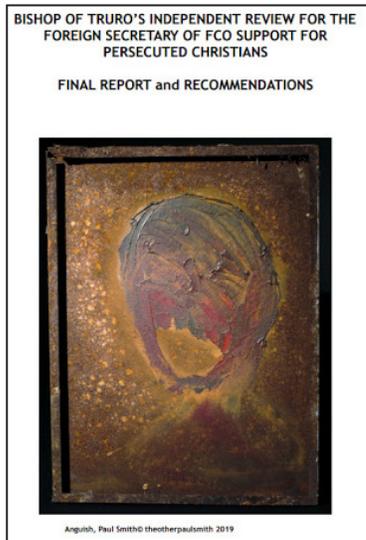
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the plight of this suffering community. By any standard, the Christian community is the most persecuted religious community in the world. In 2016, the Pew Research Centre, indicated that Christians were targeted in 145 countries, and that this persecution was increasing. In 2019, the World Watch List, which ranked countries according to the level of their persecution of Christians, indicated that 245 million Christians living in the top 50 countries suffer high levels of persecution or worse.



Other reports have indicated that 80% of those that are killed

for religious reasons are Christian. The level of Christian persecution was well documented in a report commissioned by the UK Foreign Office. A link to this report is provided below.

The report included several noteworthy quotes, including one from the former Chief Rabbi of the UK, Jonathan Sacks, who said, "The persecution of Christians throughout much of the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia and elsewhere is one of the crimes against humanity of our time and I am appalled at the lack of protest that it has evoked." As one journalist wrote in an article in the UK's Spectator newspaper, "The global war on Christians remains the greatest story never told".

We also expressed our concern that both measurement and transparency was required in the Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) program to ensure that Christians were fairly represented. We cited a 2016 Wall Street Journal article that examined the 12,600 Syrian refugees that were resettled to the United States under President Obama. The reporters found that less than 0.5% of the refugees were Christian. This despite the fact that Christians represented 10% of the pre-war Syrian population, and that they were targeted for genocide by Daesh/ISIS. The US relied upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to select refugees for its resettlement

program, as does Canada. The data suggests that the process by which the UNHCR selects refugees is deeply flawed and is in need of significant reform. We are concerned that the same level of under-representation of Christians that took place in the US program is taking place in Canada's Government funded GAR program. We urged the Minister to review the GAR program to ensure that Christians are fairly represented within it, and that IRCC provide the needed transparency of religious affiliation of refugees sponsored under the GAR program.

To access the UK Foreign Office report, simply click on the following link:

<https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/storage/2019/07/final-report-and-recommendations.pdf>

Project Hope Matching: An Appeal to Parishes

As you may recall, our office undertook a mission trip to Bangkok, Thailand in 2019, where we met and interviewed many dozens of Pakistani Christian families. There we heard their stories of the persecution and violence that they faced in their homeland, often because of the Blasphemy Law, and the suffering that they continue to experience in Thailand where they are not afforded any protection as refugees. Thai authorities conduct regular raids searching for illegal immigrants and when caught, place them into terribly overcrowded detention centres where they languish for many years. Using available Project Hope funds, we were able to sponsor 23 of these families.

We are now looking to match these families with parishes who would be willing to welcome, and journey with the refugee family during their first year of arrival to Canada, assisting them with their integration.

We recognize the challenges that this pandemic has

Pakistan's Blasphemy Law

Pakistan's blasphemy law was created to combat any show of contempt toward the Muslim religion. It has grown increasingly harsh with constitutional amendments made in 1974 and the program of "Islamization" of the legal code.

According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's 2019 annual report, there have been 62 documented cases of murder at the hands of vigilante mobs inspired by Pakistan's blasphemy laws since 1990. Many of the Pakistani Christian refugee families in Thailand would face the death penalty under Pakistan's blasphemy law if they returned home.

Project Hope Matching: An Appeal to Parishes

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created for parish fundraising, and while we would never discourage a parish from fundraising in support of their family, we are not expecting any parish to do so. Full Project Hope funding is available for these families and for eight African families that we are also trying to match with parishes.

If you are interested in being matched with one of these families, please contact our Outreach team by email at oratoutreach@archtoronto.org or by phone at 416.934.3400 x803. You can choose the family that you wish to sponsor from a number of profiles that we will send to you. Each profile includes a picture of the family along with their details, and a brief description of their refugee story.

The refugee application for most of these families was submitted last year, and as such, are likely to arrive to Canada within the next 1-3 years. Please consider sponsoring a family today!

Upcoming Sponsorships for Yukon Cares



Pre-COVID Settlement Committee Meeting, 2019

Over the years, ORAT has had the privilege of collaborating with the Diocese of Whitehorse and the Yukon Cares group, in the sponsorship of a number of our refugee families.

Recently Yukon Cares, which is comprised of residents of Whitehorse who have joined together to respond to the global refugee crisis, has agreed to settle one of the Pakistani Christian families that ORAT interviewed during its 2019 Mission Trip to Thailand. The following is an excerpt from one of their newsletters. We want to thank Yukon Cares and the Diocese of Whitehorse for saying “Yes” to sponsoring one of the Pakistani Christian cases.

Yukon Cares is committed to sponsoring a father and young son who are currently living in Thailand. Thailand is not welcoming to refugees. The family is originally from Pakistan where they

were persecuted for being Christians. With the current COVID-19 restrictions in place, we are not sure when they will come to Whitehorse. If you are interested in letter-writing to the father, please contact us at Yukon.cares@gmail.com. This would offer him support and hope. The funding for this sponsorship is through a Catholic initiative called Project Hope and we are partnered with the Catholic Diocese of Whitehorse, and the Archdiocese of Toronto.

Question & Answers

Source: RSTP Bulletin October 9, 2020

Question: What kind of Private Sponsor Refugee (PSR) application processing is currently being conducted by Visa Offices overseas?

Answer: *Processing the applications of refugees whose travel was cancelled before the imposition of the travel restrictions remains the priority for IRCC. As IRCC are still in the early stages of resettlement travel resumption, making sure that travel is facilitated where possible remains at the top of their current operations strategy.*

Question: Are Visa Offices conducting interviews? When are interviews that were scheduled for March 2020 likely to be re-scheduled?

Answer: *IRCC’s ability to conduct interviews relies largely on the capacity of each Visa Office; the ability of UNHCR and the IOM to assist; the possibility of travel within a country or a region; and, the overall conditions in the refugee’s country of residence.*

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Update from IRCC Regarding the Immigration Loans Program

In March 2020, IRCC suspended collection activities for their Immigration Loans Program (ILP) for a period of six months until September 2020. This included Transportation Loans, which forms part of the ILP. Transportation Loans are issued to refugees sponsored to Canada under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR), the Blended Visa Office-Referral (BVOR), the Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) and the Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) programs and are intended to cover the cost of their travel to Canada.

As of October 2020, IRCC has resumed sending immigration loans statements of accounts to loan recipients. Sponsored refugees who were issued a loan should begin receiving the statements of accounts shortly after November 12, 2020.

Sponsored refugees should contact IRCC's Collection Services at 1-800-667-7301 if they have questions about their loan, want to suspend pre-authorized payments or want to make other payment plans for this period. IRCC have advised that there will be no penalties for late payments within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the account balance must still be paid in full before the end of the loan term.

Question: When are sponsored refugees expected to repay the Transportation Loan?

Answer: *Sponsored refugees are expected to begin repaying their Transportation Loan one year and one month after their arrival in Canada, but they can start paying off their loan before this date if they choose to do so. For example, if the refugees arrived in Canada on June 01, 2020, the first payment will be due on July 01, 2021. Exceptionally higher-needs refugees resettled to Canada under the GAR and JAS programs may be eligible for a waiver of the Transportation Loan.*

Question: Is interest charged by IRCC on the Transportation Loan?

Answer: *No, interest is no longer charged by IRCC on Transportation Loans.*

Education Updates

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ORAT has migrated all of its information sessions to an on-line webinar platform. Until further notice, ORAT will no longer hold any in person information sessions.

A webinar is a live online virtual event. It is an educational or instructive session that includes audio and visual communication between a speaker and attendees.

Registration for these information sessions will continue through ORAT's [Eventbrite](#) page. Attendees will receive a confirmation notification 48 hours before the start of the webinar. The notification will include the link to the webinar.



The Office for Refugees is Supported by

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**Office for Refugees
Archdiocese of Toronto**

1220 Yonge Street, Suite 203

Toronto, ON M4T 1W1

t: 416.934.3400 x 804

e: oratrefugeeoffice@archtoronto.org

www.archtoronto.org/refugee