

Refugee Journey Across Africa Ends

Story Date: January 2025



My name is Haile. I share this account of my journey as a refugee, which saw me traverse much of the continent of Africa, in search of safety.

The regime in my country, Eritrea, is known for its oppressive rule against its citizens. Forced conscription, disappearances, and indefinite national service are but some of the main push factors that continue to force young Eritreans to risk their lives to flee the country.

My own plight was no different. I became a victim of the regime's policy on forced conscription for national service. I was exploited under the guise of national service. My dissent to the government's policy resulted in my detention for six months where I experienced inhuman treatment and torture. In 2017, I fled my country Eritrea, to Sudan.

While in Sudan, it soon became apparent that it was not a safe place for refugees. This was during the time when the government of Omar al-Bashir was overthrown in 2019 plunging the country into a political and social crisis. The question of safety and security became so concerning, especially for us refugees. We lived in constant fear and anxiety. It was common for refugees to be detained or taken hostage from the streets and residential areas of Khartoum by various armed groups, trafficked in exchange for ransom money. Many refugees were smuggled to Libya in this manner. The Sudanese police frequently rounded-up foreign nationals for



deportation to their home countries, increasing our fears and creating nightly uncertainties.



I strongly believed that God had a plan for my life despite our experiences and difficulties. I prayed continuously to God to make a way for me to escape that country and lead a peaceful life. One day, God answered my prayers. My brother explained my situation to his friend, Father Ivo, a Salesian Priest.

Father Ivo sought the help of his Salesian missionary counterparts in Toronto at St. Benedict's Parish to sponsor me. The parish was touched by my situation and generously decided to sponsor me to Canada. This was wonderful news. My sponsorship application process began in June 2020.

Hoping for a better life, I was overjoyed by this development. After a long delay, my refugee application was finalized by Immigration Canada in March 2023. I was scheduled to travel to Canada in July 2023 from Khartoum, Sudan. Unfortunately, a civil war erupted in April 2023, and my scheduled travel was disrupted and cancelled. Khartoum quickly turned into a battleground, and residents began to flee to neighboring countries. Fearing for my life, I decided to escape again, this time to Ethiopia. I was relocated to a newly formed refugee camp. However, due to frequent conflicts between the Ethiopian army and local Amhara militants around the refugee camp, the registration processes were hampered. Additionally, the lack of basic protections and necessities of life led me to make another difficult decision to leave Ethiopia and flee to Uganda in November 2023. I traveled through the desert and forests of Kenya on foot for six weeks. After the treacherous journey through Kenya, I arrived in Kampala, Uganda, enduring immense physical and psychological scars.

My resettlement was paused again as I needed to update my application to reflect my new country of asylum, resulting in my travel to Canada being delayed by another year and two months.

I finally arrived in Canada in September 2024. Throughout this treacherous journey, with all its challenges, God's plan was perfect and in place. This led

me to my new community at St. Benedict's Parish in Etobicoke, which has welcomed and embraced me as one of their own. The future in Canada for me is promising and only beginning to unfold. I am grateful to the Office for Refugees (ORAT) and the Salesian community that ensured my safe resettlement to Canada to begin a new life.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and future.” Jeremiah 29:11