

Roseline's Refugee Story



My name is Roseline. I am a mother to two wonderful children. I am from Lahore, Pakistan. In late summer of 2022, we arrived in Canada to start a new life, sponsored as refugees by the Archdiocese of Toronto. I want to share our story to highlight the plight of many, who are without a voice today, so that our experiences as refugees, might provide renewed hope and shine light amidst hopelessness for so many refugees.

I grew up in a modest Christian family, with limited means and we managed for ourselves. My husband is a Rickshaw driver and I a Nursery schoolteacher worked hard to raise our children. I was forced to leave Pakistan for Thailand with my family in 2014.

It all began with two Muslim friends of my husband, who used their friendship for ulterior motives. Their aim was to make us convert to Islam. One of them even put unbearable pressure on me to leave my husband, convert to Islam and marry him. When we strongly refused to deny our Christian faith, they became aggressive: their hostility knew no bounds and we became very afraid for our safety. On a couple of occasions, they beat my husband and mishandled me, while emotionally torturing us to extent of torment. Eventually, they publicly accused us of blaspheming against their prophet Muhammed. This kind of accusation can very quickly incite a lynching mob in Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim majority country. Matters grew worse as on one occasion these men even tried to abduct my daughter as she left school; they were only prevented from doing this by the parents and other good people who were waiting to pick up their children at the end of the school day.

This was the final straw. As a parent, I was so concerned for the safety of our children. It was no longer safe for us to live safely within Lahore or move to other parts of Pakistan. My husband wanted us to leave for the sake of our lives. As we did not have enough money, my children and I decided to escape to Thailand. My husband had to stay behind, hoping to join us at a later date. Ever since that painful departure, we have not seen or heard from him, and we wonder what those supposed friends turned extremists might have done to him.

While in Thailand, life was difficult and challenging. We had no legal status to work as asylum seekers. Our travel visas to Thailand had expired. We had no legal protections as refugee claimants either. The Thai immigration authorities do not allow persons who've overstayed their visas to live in their country. You are immediately rounded up, arrested, and kept in crowded Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs). The conditions in the IDCs are horrible and treatment of detained asylum claimants is inhumane. No human beings ought to be treated in that manner. However, as asylum seekers without legal protections in Thailand, we are without a voice or any rights. Thailand is



not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention on Protection of Refugees' Rights.



We spent eight years in exile in Thailand, always living in trepidation that the police would arrest us and throw us in jail or deport back to Pakistan. These were years of struggles, hardship, fear, anxiety, isolation, and much weeping. However, along the way, my daughter and son were forced to find some work to seek out a living. In these desperate moments, we always found strength in our faith and hope in God who makes the seemingly impossible, possible.

In 2019, a group of people from the Office for Refugees, Archdiocese of Toronto came on mission, to witness the situation of Pakistani

refugees in Bangkok. A Jesuit priest in Bangkok, whom we trusted, Fr. Michael, referred us to the Office for Refugees (ORAT), whose representatives were on mission trip to meet with refugees in Bangkok.

My family, along with other refugees met with representatives of the Office for Refugees. They interviewed us and we shared our sad stories and prayed together. We were grateful that someone unknown to us had come to listen to our stories. Their presence gave us hope and a renewed faith to keep living.

After the Office for Refugee representatives returned to Canada in the months that followed, I was informed that people of the Archdiocese of Toronto had heard about our suffering and wanted to help sponsor us to Canada. My family was matched with one of the churches in the Archdiocese of Toronto, that became our sponsors for resettlement to Canada.

The application process was complicated and long but was our only hope out in Thailand. We completed different immigration forms and waited for our applications to be processed by Immigration Canada. We attended our interviews and waited anxiously for a final decision on our immigration application from Immigration Canada.

Everything was suddenly paused by COVID-19 travel restrictions imposed on by countries, including Canada. This was the most difficult period without any news. Our church group in Toronto kept regular communication with us.

We shared our fears and worries with them; they in turn offered prayers and Masses for us. This went on until 2022, when we received news that we had been approved for resettlement to Canada. I am so

glad to be in Canada and proud that Canada is my new home. I feel safe and am surrounded by a loving community. My children's future is going to be secure, and I pray constantly for those Pakistani refugee families still in Thailand.

