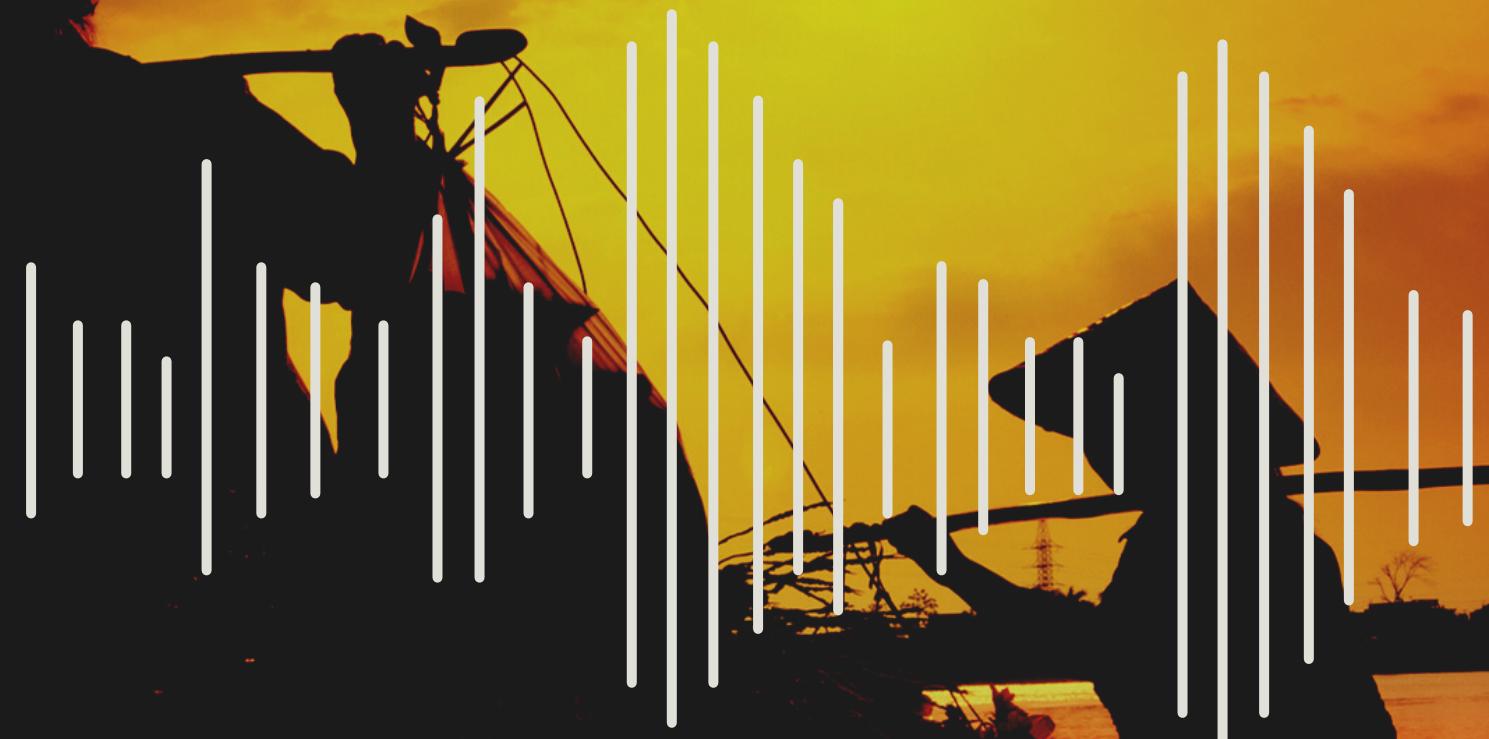


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Issue

# THE REFUGE OF VOICE

*The official newsletter of*  
**MSSUNHCR**



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**JANUARY 2021**



# MCMMASTER STUDENTS IN SUPPORT OF UNHCR



This debut of *The Refuge of Voice* introduces a unique communication channel between McMaster Students in Support of United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (MSSUNHCR) and the wider McMaster community. The Refuge of Voice seeks to shed light on the plight of refugees, migrants, displaced peoples, and asylum-seekers in a way that gives justice to these stories. Brought to you by the MSSUNHCR, we are a club that is an integral part of McMaster University—being the first of its kind on campus with a goal of advocating for refugees, highlighting their potential, and addressing their struggles.

At the MSSUNHCR, we are proud to stand in support with the UNHCR, a global organization with a mandate to safeguard the security of refugee rights. In the upcoming months, we aim to provide McMaster students with opportunities to support refugees in the Hamilton area and leverage the diversity within the McMaster community to advance our various initiatives. Through a series of community-focused events and campaigns, we plan on providing an avenue for students to learn about refugees, form meaningful connections with them, and empower them to advocate for their voices.

## GLOBAL NEWS

Written by Jayanti Jerath

### How is COVID-19 Putting Extra Stress on Refugee Resettlement and Making It Harder For Asylum Seekers?

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health crisis which health experts, citizens, and world leaders have never seen before. Marginalized groups, youth, refugees and asylum seekers are the most vulnerable groups to be impacted by the damage of COVID-19. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) released its Global Trends Report, in which it reported that 79.5 million people had been displaced since the end of 2019. With the harsh realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, the work of United Nations agencies and the role of NGOs has become ever more critical. Their work helps vulnerable populations who live in regions where the governmental services are limited and struggling to be executed sufficiently during this pandemic.

#### Rigid Migration Policies

In addition to border closures, countries have imposed rigid migration policies, which have forced asylum seekers to pause their journey. In March 2020, Uganda suspended all refugees and asylum seekers' arrival because the country's refugee camps were overcrowded; thus, maintaining social distancing was challenging due to the lack of an adequately-funded health care system.

#### Interruption in UNHCR

Due to national lockdowns, the administrative work of refugee organizations has been restricted or stopped, as seen in Italy. This pauses immigration as asylum seekers are not provided with new refugee status. This further prevents asylum seekers from accessing healthcare services as they don't have valid documents, thus risking their lives.



Migrant and asylum seekers are waiting for a bus to begin the 14-day quarantine period.

displacement crisis, and COVID-19 has increased hardships for Syrian families and refugees across the world. Due to the loss of employment, refugees take loans and child exploitation is seen amongst refugee children to alleviate their families' financial struggles.

Policymakers and politicians should establish opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers, creating equality and practicing inclusion in the policy making process. In these unpredictable times, it is essential not to neglect those fleeing harsh persecution and war and ensure governments are protecting the lives of the refugees and asylum seekers living in marginalized communities.



Syrian refugees Mustafa and Sherin stand with two of their children, Nadia, 12, and Muhammad, 10, outside their home in Amman during the COVID-19 lockdown. They fled Damascus in 2013.

## LOCAL NEWS

The Syrian Canadian Foundation hosted a virtual event celebrating the fifth anniversary of Canada welcoming Syrian refugees. The event consisted of storytelling, cultural performances, speeches, and various giveaways. Among the attendees were Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development Ahmed Hussen, Mini-

ster of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Marco Mendicino, as well as the newly appointed Minister of Transport, Omar Alghabra, who is of Syrian origins. Almost 700 people across the country signed up to attend the virtual event and demonstrated great enthusiasm in celebrating Syrian refugee stories, successes, and great contributions to Canada in the past five years.

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"One of the unsettling things about my journey, mentally, physically, and emotionally, was that I wasn't sure when or where it was going to end."

— from A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah

# OPINION PIECE SUBMISSION

## PROMPT:

"Refugees leech off our country and the only thing they are good for is stealing our culture and jobs."

*Written By Zena  
Shamli Oghli*

Oh Canada, Oh Canada.

From the bottom of my heart, with every ounce of sincerity I can muster, I am so sorry if you think this. How embarrassing for you.

Consider the word 'Canada' itself. This country owes its name to the Huron-Iroquois word kanata, meaning 'village'. Along with etymological origin in Indigenous culture, Canada forced its roots into Indigenous land and has not hesitated to opt for genocide to meet its goals. Not in the past, and not now.

So, for starters, know your place. We have been, and continue to be, apathetic intruders of this land. It is not ours.

Now, as for this anti-refugee rhetoric. While there have been higher rates of immigration to Canada since the 1990s, this influx has never, in any way, hurt Canadian jobs or culture [5]. In fact, 14.4% of refugees living in Canada for 10-30 years have started their own businesses, compared to 12.3% of people born in Canada.

Refugees have not only made jobs for themselves, but have created them for others— patriotism done right. As for stealing Canadian culture? I think we could all do without 'Yummy'.

It is always interesting to see how xenophobia cloaks itself. That is, of course, what refugee aversion represents. It was never an economic concern. Consider the fact that current immigration rates, although high, are much lower than they were in 1913 and the years prior [5]. And that populace built Canada from the ground up. Today's refugees bring high labour skill, cultural diversity, and above all, retrospective gratitude and motivation. So no, it is not refugees that 'our' country should fear. What we should worry about is our unchecked angel complex, and the virulent xenophobia festering within our borders.

No, our problems are much more sinister than job insecurity.

“

"In a time when headlines are centred around xenophobia, a harmful narrative surrounding refugees has emerged. The narrative, based on ideals of exclusion, suggests that refugees offer nothing to a country — clearly, this could not be further from the truth."

- Amr Saleh



# Opinion Piece Submission

WRITTEN BY EILEEN CORNEJO

**A**lthough I cannot speak for every refugee's experience, I do want to share a little bit of mine. My family and I arrived at the Canadian border to ask for refugee status almost 4 years ago. It does not seem like a long time ago, but for us, it feels like an eternity. Both of my parents have always been extremely hardworking people, and that did not change once we started our new life in Canada.

The Canadian government was extremely kind to my family. Without their initial help, we might have not been able to be where we are today as quickly as we did. I do know one thing for sure, we would have been able to get there someday. From day one both my parents made sure to apply for a work permit. They wanted to start working as soon as possible. In 4 years, my mom has had a total of 6 days of 'vacation.' My dad has had multiple jobs at a time, from driving trucks to cleaning schools. Both have pushed their limits to provide for both my sister and I. Both are living proof that immigrants and refugees have to work extra hard to **EARN** their place in society.

Refugees have to struggle and fight harder than anyone else in order to achieve something, anything. They have to overcome emotional hardships, stigmas, legal processes, stereotypes, learning a new language, physically demanding jobs... all at the same time, all day, every day. So no, refugees are not here to leech off your country and steal your job. They are here because they had to escape their countries, or because they just wanted to offer a better life to their family. Whatever the reason was, it came at a high price. So be kind and please, offer a helping hand when you can. You may literally change someone's life.

# The Sky and the Earth: Sarah Hegazi's Narrative

WRITTEN BY SHANZEY ALI

**O**riginally written in Arabic, this line of poetry by Sarah Hegazi was part of a heart-wrenching farewell on Hegazi's Instagram, posted before the activist died of suicide this past June. An activist for LGBTQ rights, Hegazi sought asylum in Canada after being imprisoned and tortured in her native Egypt, eventually losing her life to unrelenting trauma.

“To the world”, she wrote. “You’ve been greatly cruel, but I forgive.”

In 2017, Hegazi, an openly gay woman, proudly raised a rainbow flag in a concert in Cairo, marking a momentous step in declaring her true self to the world. Soon, a tempest of outrage overtook the media, leading to Egyptian authorities arresting several people, including Hegazi. In prison, she was tortured, molested, and later placed in solitary confinement, until her release on bail. The Canadian government then granted Hegazi political asylum.

While many believe that finding refuge in another country can soften the pain of asylum seekers, Hegazi's story sheds light on the opposite—an overlooked truth about being a refugee. In Hegazi's words, "Home is not land and borders. It's about people you love [...] Here in Canada, I haven't people, I haven't family, I haven't friends. So I'm not happy here." Although grateful for the protection provided in Canada, Hegazi wished to return to her homeland, be with her siblings, and continue her fight against discrimination. Losing her mother to cancer shortly after arriving in Canada only punctuated Hegazi's growing loneliness, and the nightmares, panic attacks, and depression that had gripped Hegazi after her imprisonment eventually threw Hegazi into the arms of suicide.



Hegazi waving a rainbow flag at a concert in Cairo.



A photo posted on Hegazi's Instagram in her last few days.

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