

# Burundi Refugee Story: A Journey to Hope in Sudbury



In 2022, a resilient woman from Burundi embarked on a heart wrenching journey to Sudbury, a city in Canada nestled thousands of miles away from the tumultuous events in her homeland. Burundi, a country in central Africa, shares borders with Uganda and Rwanda. However, the tale she carries transcends geographical boundaries, encapsulating the universal struggle for survival, resilience, and the pursuit of hope.

The history of Burundi is a narrative steeped in pain and tragedy, paralleling the haunting chronicles articulated in Romeo Dallaire's seminal work, "Shake Hands with the Devil." While the world was focused on the civil war and genocide in neighboring Rwanda, a parallel narrative unfolded in Burundi. Extremist elements within the majority Hutu population orchestrated a campaign of terror against the minority Tutsi population,

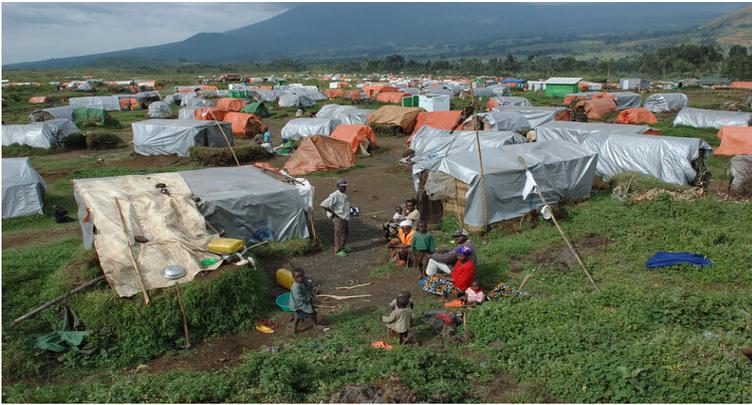
alongside any moderate Hutus who dared to oppose them. The systematic nature of kidnappings and killings was executed with meticulous precision, largely escaping the global spotlight.

The crescendo of violence reached its zenith in 2015 when the President, defying calls to step down, sought an illegal third term in office. Protests erupted, primarily led by the young university age population, triggering brutal reprisals from both the police and militia. Amelie, recounting her experiences, vividly describes the horror: "I resided in the suburb of Musaga and actively participated in demonstrations against the President's audacious power grab. Witnessing a fellow protester being ruthlessly shot, I felt an overwhelming fear that spurred my flight to my birth village.



There, the looming threat of the Imbonerakure militia, known for terrorizing young people, compelled me to seek refuge in the convent of St. Michel with my aunt, a nun. Fearing the relentless pursuit of the militia and police, I fled once more, making the arduous journey to Uganda. The odyssey involved traversing treacherous terrain by bus and foot, navigating forests, trails, and, at times, encountering fellow refugees on a similar quest for safety." Amelie's journey, spanning 16 challenging days, brought her to the relative safety of Uganda.

The harsh realities of life in refugee camps became her new normal communal showers, limited food rations, and the perpetual struggle for essentials like water and firewood. Tragically, the specter of malnutrition haunted the camp, claiming the lives of innocent children. "Many children died from malnutrition I saw their bellies swell and their hair turn red and then they died. There was no support for their mothers they had to keep on living and care for their remaining children."



For seven long years, Amelie existed in a state of limbo, trapped in a daily routine devoid of hope. The monotony of camp life, coupled with the ever present specter of danger, cast a shadow over her aspirations for a better life. The turning point emerged during the challenging era of the Covid-19 pandemic. The news of her relocation to Canada, delivered through an email from dedicated volunteers, became a lifeline, a beacon of hope that touched her heart profoundly.

The culmination of this journey unfolded dramatically upon her arrival in Sudbury. Awaiting her at the airport were volunteers, not merely holding a Canadian flag but embracing her with tears of joy and warmth. Their genuine hospitality and support marked the beginning of Amelie's transformative experience in Canada.



Now nestled in Sudbury, supported by Project Hope and the Office for Refugees, Amelie is not just a survivor but a woman with a vision for the future. Grateful for the unwavering assistance provided by Sudbury volunteers, Project Hope, and the Office for Refugees, Amelie acknowledges the people of Canada for extending a welcoming hand to refugees. Her gratitude echoes through her newfound opportunities studying English, training as a Personal Support Worker, and engaging in night-time work cleaning buildings. Amidst the challenges of integration, she finds solace in the prospect of a brighter future.

Amelie's story transcends the boundaries of time and place, becoming a testament to the resilience of the human spirit, the power of compassion, and the promise of hope in the face of adversity.