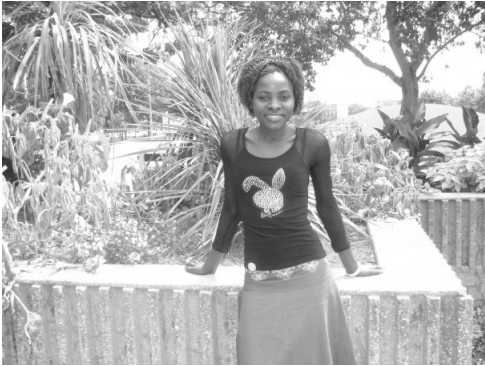


# SUPPORT BURUNDIAN REFUGEE JOSELYNE JOHN



Joselyne John is currently studying at Simon Fraser University, having just finished her first year in health sciences. She is a Burundian refugee who has been sponsored to study and become a permanent resident in Canada by the World University Services of Canada (WUSC).

However Joselyne's family – including parents and twelve siblings – are still living in extreme precarity, hardship, and turmoil in refugee camps in conditions few of us could imagine, let alone bear.

Joselyne is hoping to sponsor her family through Canadian immigration regulations; however she is required to demonstrate having a certain amount of money and income. In order to do so, she requires your financial support. Whatever donation amount – small or large- might be able to restore some of this family's happiness, safety, peace of mind, and dignity after years and years of struggle.

Joselyne is also an extremely talented knitter and crocheter. Based on the principle of 'Solidarity Not Charity', Joselyne is selling her handwoven merchandise as part of this fundraising effort. You can check out her wares at <http://www.joselyne.etsy.com>

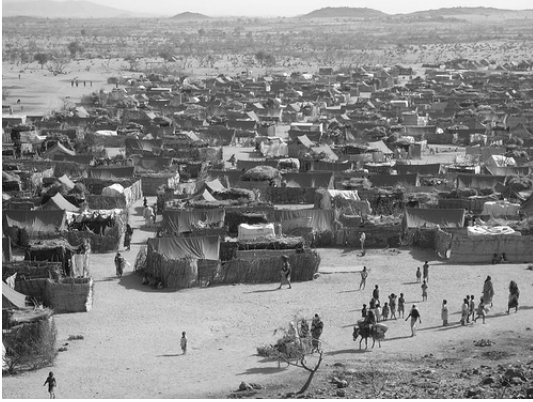
Any support you can offer - including a donation or if you are interested in purchasing any merchandise- will be deeply appreciated. You can make a direct secure Pay pal donation through <http://www.sfukc.viviti.com/give> (the SFU Crochet and Knit Club which has offered their support!) If you have any questions, contact Joselyne at 604 319 1549 or [joselyne.john@gmail.com](mailto:joselyne.john@gmail.com).



## About Joselyne John

Joselyne has been a refugee since the age of six years. Joselyne was born in Bujumbura, the capital city of Burundi, in 1987. Joselyne, along with her 12 siblings and parents, was forced to flee Burundi for neighbouring Rwanda and subsequently to Tanzania in 1993. In 1993 the family fled to Tanzania separately; with Joselyne leaving with her

elder sister aged 14. The two walked through the forest during dark for approximately one week, barely sleeping or eating. As described by Joselyne "It was impossible to leave the country. We walked through the forest since it was the only place where killers would not easily find us. They was no actual path so we had to create one, sometimes thorns would hurt us, and the forest was stinking with the bodies of dead people. It was the scariest moment in my infancy."



*(refugee camp in Tanzania)*

Eventually the two arrived at the UN refugee camps in Tanzania and were fortunately reunited with their family. They lived in a Tanzanian refugee camp called Lukole for five years in extremely dire conditions, depending on UN agencies for basic necessities including tents, food, and water. Despite these conditions, the camps were characterized by a sense of solidarity and belonging as people supported each other with what little they had. Primary schooling was provided by the UN, which Joselyne and her siblings greatly benefited from.

The family was then forced to the refugee camp Dzaleka in Malawi due to a repatriation agreement between the Tanzanian and Burundian governments that saw the return, including forced return, of Burundian refugees despite the ongoing turmoil in the country. Yet again, the conditions and hardship in Malawi that Joselyne's family faced were indescribable. Especially as a family of fifteen, food and shelter was scarce with food rations running out before the end of the month. Living in the refugee camp was considered a 'privilege' and a series of restrictive regulations constrained their mobility including being unable to secure employment or education beyond the vicinity of the camp.

Since education in the camp went only as far as high school, Joselyne's two older brothers decided to leave the camp and pursue a higher education in South Africa, where one is currently entering college and the other is finishing a degree in medicine. However their legal status in South Africa is unstable as they are not citizens; will be unable to remain permanently in South Africa and therefore live with the daily anxiety and fear of becoming displaced again; and are affected by the anti-migrant xenophobic violence that has plagued South Africa (See for example New York Times article "South Africans Take Out Rage on Immigrants: [www.nytimes.com/2008/05/20/world/africa/20safrica.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/20/world/africa/20safrica.html))

While in the Malawi refugee camp, Joselyne finished high school through the camp's educational program implemented through the Jesuit Refugee Service. Upon completion, she heard about WUSC and their Student Refugee Program, which assists refugee students in pursuing post-secondary education in Canada. According to WUSC, "since 1978, WUSC's Student Refugee Program has enabled more than 900 capable young men and women to resettle in Canada as permanent residents, pursue their education in an environment free of violence and fear and transform their lives." As a sponsoring organization, WUSC arranges permanent residency for sponsored refugee students.

As one can imagine, this is an incredibly competitive process with placements for approximately 50 students out of the world's hundreds of thousands, if not millions, displaced and marginalized young refugees seeking a better education and life. Joselyne is now at snowy Burnaby Mountain and immensely grateful for the new opportunities she has been afforded. In her words "During my eight months in Canada I was able to observe the friendly Canadian environment and their incredible commitment to save lives. I have made friends and I am still making more friends. Everyone I meet I consider to be part of my Canadian family. "

## Political Situation in Burundi

Burundi has been plagued by Hutu-Tutsi divisions much like Rwanda. It is believed that historically, the categories of Hutu and Tutsi have an origin in pre-colonial East and Central Africa, however became rigidified during Belgian colonization and colonial governance structures that privileged the Tutsi minority both politically and economically.

Upon independence, Burundi established itself as a constitutional monarchy with a Tutsi Royal Louis Rwagasore as prime minister and a Tutsi-controlled army. In Burundi's first elections following independence in 1965, a Hutu Prime Minister was elected but was immediately assassinated. He was succeeded by another Hutu, however the monarch mollified the elections and the second Hutu prime Minister was also assassinated. This resulted in a Hutu-led coup of the monarchy with the Tutsi-dominated army responding with the killing of almost all Hutu politicians.

A military dictatorship persisted in Burundi for another 27 years till 1993 with cycles of violence continuing throughout that period. This included the 1972 genocide of approximately 300,000 Hutu by the Burundian army with over 500,000 being forced to flee into Zaire, Rwanda, and Tanzania.

In 1993, the military dictatorship dissolved and the people of Burundi held elections resulting in the victory of a Hutu government. This President was assassinated, throwing the country into civil strife yet again. According to the UN International Commission of Inquiry for Burundi, a mass killing of approximately 400,000 Tutsis occurred, followed by indiscriminate killings of Hutus. This again forced the displacement of over 400,000 Burundian refugees – primarily Hutu – into Tanzania in 1993 and the years following.

The situation in Burundi continues to be politically volatile with a series of coups and each government committing egregious human rights violations. Currently, a process of peace, reconciliation and a power sharing agreement through the constitution are being negotiated but has been marred by the collective memory of violence and trauma faced by Burundians. As recent as 2002, according to Refugee International, an estimated 5,000 refugees per week flee Burundi.

In Tanzania, this has led to heightened anti-refugee sentiment with the Tanzanian government forcing the repatriation of Burundian and Rwandan refugees since the late 1990's. Instead of returning however, many refugees fled to other neighboring countries. According to a 2006 report by Amnesty International "protection and assistance for Burundian and other refugees in Tanzania are eroding and refugees are feeling undue pressure to repatriate before their countries of origin have undergone fundamental changes." As recent as June 2008, UNHCR spokesperson Peter Kessler stated "The number of Burundian refugees returning home from refugee camps in western Tanzania has risen sharply over the last few weeks amid rising concern that that their return is not fully voluntary."

There can be no doubt that Burundian refugees, such as Joselyne's family, are in need of safety and dignity and should be able to determine where they will feel most secure. Joselyne and her family have struggled and suffered for years and our collective humanity and support can go a long way in facilitating the process of this family attempting to rebuild their life.