

From: Gregory Sharkey SJ • Kathmandu, Nepal

Re: Burmese Refugees in Nepal

This summarizes the situation of the family of Mathias Khumpi, Burmese refugees in Kathmandu, for whom we seek resettlement via private sponsorship in Canada.

UNHCR File Number 706-12C0016

Notification of Positive Decision re Refugee Status: 12 Sep 2012.

Notification of Negative Decision re Resettlement application: 17 Feb 2016.

Notification of Positive Decision re renewed Refugee Status: 19 Dec 2016.

Family Members:

Husband: Mathias Khumpi: Born 29 Jan 1984, in Chin State. Family migrated to Sagaing.

Wife: Veronica Sai Nei Thiam: Born 24 Aug 1983, in Sagaing Division, to Karen parents.

Son: Nicholas Thian Hlei Thang: Born 15 Dec 2008, in Kalay District, Sagaing Division.

Daughter: Elizabeth Lal Nun Par: Born 5 Dec 2010, in Kalay District, Sagaing Division.

Case history summary as accepted by UNHCR in 2012. With additional notes.

• **24 MAR 2012:**

Burmese Army soldiers appeared in Aung Ywa village, and approached Veronica, her father (Ral Lian Thang), and her cousin (Mahtan), who were working in their fields. The soldiers aggressively questioned the family members. The soldiers were angered that, being ethnic Karens, they were not fluent in Burmese. The soldiers demanded food and water, which the family agreed to provide.

Soldiers followed the cousin into Veronica's father's house and assaulted the girl, raping her repeatedly. Alerted by her screams, Veronica's father came to her aid. The soldiers beat him, jumping on his rib cage and bashing in his skull with rifle butts. Other soldiers dragged Veronica to the edge of their property and raped her until she fell unconscious.

Doctors at the public Kalay Hospital refused to treat Veronica's father, for fear of army reprisal. He was taken to a distant private hospital where he died that night of the injuries the soldiers had inflicted.

• **2 APR 2012:**

Encouraged by fellow villagers in Aung Ywa, Mathias filed a complaint at Kalay Military Headquarters regarding the rapes and murder.

• **8 APR 2012:**

In response, eight soldiers from Tuithimlui Army Camp, including several of the perpetrators, returned to Aung Ywa and summoned villagers to the headman's house. Their commander demanded that the rape victims identify the guilty, and menaced them into silence.

Mathias was beaten in front of the villagers and threatened with death, to force him to withdraw the complaint and say the report was fabricated. Soldiers then ransacked Mathias & Veronica's home, and locked them out. The soldiers remained in the village as evening approached. Later, having taken the family's documents, they confiscated their land.

Rightly fearing for their lives, the Khumpis fled the village that night, eventually crossing into Manipur State, India on 12 April. Ms. Rose Mary Gangte, a resident of Moreh, Manipur offered the family shelter. In Manipur they were advised to find their way to Kathmandu, as they stood a better chance of gaining UNHCR protection there than in India or Bangladesh.

• **26 APR 2012:**

The Khumpis crossed into Nepal and came to Kathmandu. As devout Catholics they sought refuge at the Catholic cathedral parish, which offered shelter. Since their arrival they have lived in a cramped storeroom behind the church toilets, next to the electricity generator. They successfully applied for refugee status with UNHCR, granted on 12 September, then applied for third-country resettlement. Mathias, a Science graduate and high school teacher, was employed as the church gatekeeper. Until 2016 he was also called on regularly by UNHCR to serve as a translator for other refugees. *(see inside page)*



## ST. MONICA PARISH

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January 6, 2019

### Epiphany of the Lord

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The Church celebrates the Epiphany of the Lord: the manifestation to the Gentile, in the persons of the Magi, of the life of God himself. Like the Magi, our journey to Christ has its own direction and trail. Each person pays Christ homage and offers the treasures one holds. The reward is the same — a path away from the dangers of sin and death, and toward life.

### LITURGY OF THE WORD

In the first reading, Isaiah calls the people to rise up because the light (God) has come. They will praise the Lord with overflowing hearts. St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians that all are co-heirs and co-partners in the work and promises of Christ. The Magi in the gospel journey far as they seek out the long-awaited Christ and found the child Jesus in Bethlehem.

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### Today's Readings:

1st: Isaiah 60.1-6

Psalm: 72

2nd: Ephesians 3.2-3a, 5-6

Gospel: Matthew 2.1-12

PASTOR: **Rev. Robert Wong, SJ**

### PARISH OFFICE HOURS

Monday – Friday

**9:30 am – 1 pm / 1:30 pm – 4:30 pm**

### MASS SCHEDULES

WEEKDAYS: **9:00 am**

SATURDAYS: **9:30 am & 5:00 pm**

SUNDAYS: **9:00 am & 11:00 am**

### CONFESSION SCHEDULE

SATURDAYS: **4:30 pm – 4:55 pm**

CONFESSIONS: 10 MINUTES BEFORE DAILY

MASS OR BY REQUEST AT OTHER TIMES

### NOVENA TO

**OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP**

WEDNESDAYS: **7:00 pm**

MASS FOLLOWED BY NOVENA

& BENECTION

### BAPTISM COURSE

EVERY 2<sup>ND</sup> TUESDAY OF THE MONTH AT **6 pm**

### BAPTISMS

4<sup>th</sup> SATURDAY AFTER 9:30 am MASS

### HOUSE BLESSINGS

PLEASE CALL THE PARISH OFFICE

## PARISH UPDATES

**KUDOS** – Your prayers, Christmas cards and gifts had been received with much gratitude. May the blessings of the Lord remain with you always. Fr. Robert

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**PREP and RCIA** – Prep Catechesis begins on Tuesday, January 8 and RCIA resumes on Thursday, Jan. 10. New participants are most welcome. Please contact the Office.

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**KUDOS – finally summary of Project Advance 2018** 162 (43.3%) out of 374 registered individuals and households have given the collected sum of \$67,317.00; that's 2.7 times of our \$25,000 shared commitment to the Archdiocese plus a small expense for administration. There is also about \$4,100 carried forward into 2019. We can take ownership of our generous spirit. May the Lord bless us with his grace upon grace. Thank you, Lord!

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**The Khumpis** – We received our Christmas miracle one week before Christmas Day. The family of four has been approved resettlement for private sponsorship resettlement under St Monica Parish' auspices. It is very appropriate to share with you an in-depth of this family on the Feast of the Epiphany. We'll need to form a resettlement committee to assist them. If you wish to participate and share your expertise, please contact the parish office.

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**Pastoral Council Meeting—Saturday, January 12, 10:30am is our next scheduled meeting. Please mark your calendar.**

*(continued from right page)*

### • 05 SEP 2018 UPDATE:

During the summer the Khumpis received the very good news that the Archdiocese of Vancouver, BC, is willing to sponsor the family under Canada's private sponsorship scheme. The archdiocese is registered with the Canadian government as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder. As an SAH they can assign a case to a "constituent group". In this case, it is St. Monica's, a Jesuit administrated parish in Richmond, in the metro Vancouver area. The pastor there, Fr Robert Wong SJ, is very ready to help the Khumpis.

Fr Greg Sharkey SJ (UNE), director of the Boston College Nepal Program and professor at Kathmandu University, assisted the Khumpis in completing the extensive refugee resettlement and immigration application paperwork, which the Archdiocese of Vancouver has added to their application.

In order for a private sponsorship to be processed the SAH & CG sponsors must demonstrate that they have set aside approximately 37,000 Canadian dollars to assist the family during its first year of resettlement. Neither the Archdiocese nor the parish can take on this financial burden, in addition to their legal sponsorship. Peter and Erin Church are close friends of the Khumpis. They got to know them when Peter was posted to the US embassy in Kathmandu. Peter and Erin have nobly committed to raising the funds necessary to meet Canadian government requirements. We are now actively soliciting help in pulling together this amount.

END

### Stewardship Reflection

The three kings in today's Gospel traveled a great distance at considerable cost to offer their richest gifts to the Infant Jesus. How far will I go and what will I offer to do homage to this newborn King and Saviour?



*(continued from back page)*

### • 17 FEB 2016:

Over the last two years, three families and nine individual applicants were processed for resettlement, leaving only a few Burmese: a widow with young children, who might have difficulty in adapting to life in the US.; and an ethnic Nepali of Burmese birth, whose 'need' to be resettled abroad is questionable, given the ease with which returning Nepalis can assimilate here.

In the middle of February Mathias Khumpi asked for an appointment at UNHCR to learn why his family's resettlement process was delayed. He was called to the Kathmandu office, where a minor local staff member handed him the family's rejection notice. It was explained to him that, due to the great number of Syrian refugees seeking asylum, all Nepal cases were downgraded in priority.

His family's status as refugees was not revoked. While subsistence aid was curtailed, UNHCR has continued to provide approximately 150 US dollars per year to assist with the children's education in private schools. As foreigners they are not entitled to attend Nepal government schools. The children have both been enrolled at a Jesuit school, St Xavier's, where they have been extraordinarily successful.

### • 25 JUN 2018:

Mathias was summoned to UNHCR Nepal, along with the mother of another Burmese family of six. Both are members of the Chin community. While Mathias's wife, Veronica is recognized as a member of the Kayan (Karen) tribe, their children are registered as Chin.

The UN has recently determined that, because of a truce between the Chin National Army and the government of Myanmar. It is safe for all Chin refugees to return to Chin State, with UN assistance and a promise of future protection and aid.

Mathias was informed that, within the month he will be called back to the UNHCR offices and asked to surrender the family's refugee documents. Chin who volunteer to return home will begin the process of repatriation. (The family of six has opted to accept this.) If Mathias refuses to volunteer for repatriation, he will be forced to re-apply for refugee status, with a strong likelihood that the application will be rejected.

**Comment:** Whether or not it is safe for most Chin to return to Chin State in Burma, where the UN will assist with reintegration is irrelevant in the Khumpis case. While Mathias is Chin, his wife belongs to a separate ethnic community. Mathias has been a resident of Sagaing, and not Chin State, for most of his life. The family fled, not because of civil war, but because they were explicitly targeted, severely abused, and threatened with death by officials of the Burmese Army, who control Sagaing. This situation has not changed, and it would be foolish of them to think they can return safely, without fear of reprisal from the army.

### Future Prospects:

The Khumpis' only hope of maintaining their refugee status when Mathias is summoned to UNHCR is to demonstrate that steps are being taken to resettle them in a 3<sup>rd</sup> country. After exhaustively exploring possibilities in the US, UK and Australia, it seems that only private sponsorship in Canada is a realistic possibility.

Because of the Nepal government's well-known poor treatment of refugees, and the impossibility of safe repatriation to Myanmar, the UNHCR's negative decision puts the Khumpis in a perilous situation. Nepal grudgingly respects UNHCR refugee status, but does not grant asylum. It treats refugees as illegal aliens. It levies a daily fine of five US dollars on each adult refugee for overstaying their visas. The Khumpis currently owe over US \$20,000 in back fines. The children are ineligible for education in government-run schools, and worthwhile employment is virtually impossible. They are not allowed to own or operate a business. Worst of all, this is the cloud under which their children would grow up – as stateless persons.

More worrisome is that their illegal status leaves them vulnerable to reprisals and extortion, as they can be arrested on a whim, with no right of redress. The Nepal Police's treatment of Tibetan refugees, including many who were born here, or have lived here for decades, gives proof of that.

Given the family's excellent English-speaking skills, education level, and very positive and resilient disposition, resettlement of this family would be far easier than most. *(see left page)*