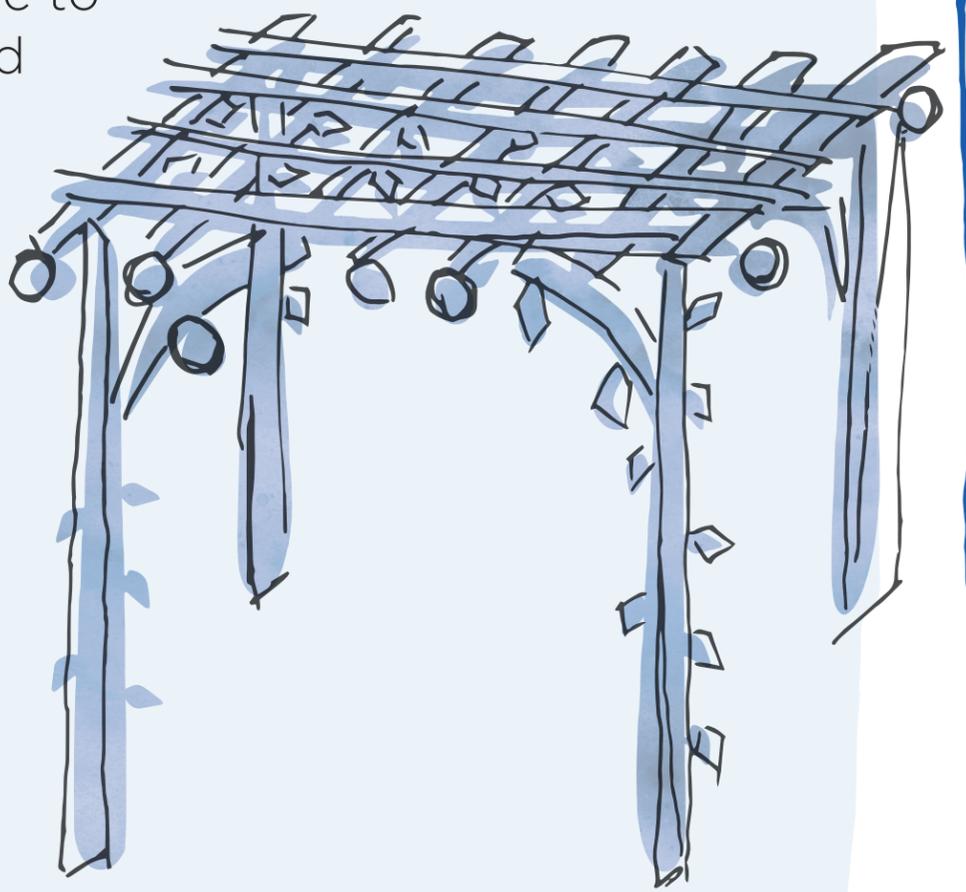


# IN SEARCH OF A SHELTER OF PEACE: STORIES FROM TODAY'S REFUGEES

Each year, we recreate the huts in which our Israelite ancestors found refuge after escaping slavery in Egypt and wandering in the desert for 40 years. Sukkot allows us time to recognize our own fragility and reminds us that, for so many, shelter remains impermanent.

Today, 65 million refugees and displaced people still wander the earth in search of a safe place to call home. This Sukkot we invite five of these individuals into our sukkah to tell their stories.

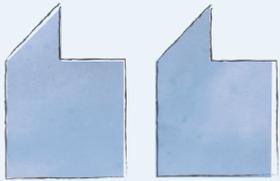


*This exhibit is brought to you by HIAS, the world's oldest, and only Jewish, refugee organization. HIAS works with refugees in 12 countries in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. We also resettle refugees who are rebuilding their lives here in the United States. HIAS is mobilizing the Jewish community's response to the global refugee crisis. Visit [www.hias.org](http://www.hias.org) for opportunities to help.*

# NICIA\* Boko, Congo



\*Pseudonym used to protect the identity of victims of sexual and gender-based violence.



I was 14 when war broke out in my village in Boko, Congo. My stepfather, a Mai Mai rebel fighter, took the family to the rebels' camp, hoping for protection.

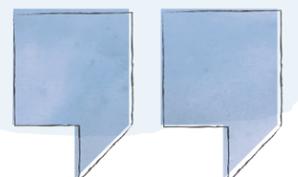
Shortly after we arrived, a rebel approached my family asking to marry me. Even though I said I did not want to be married at such a young age, the man insisted and sexually assaulted me while my mother was away.

Instead of marrying the man, as is common under these circumstances, I tricked the man into providing me with money to set up a proper home for us, which I then used to flee for my life.

I made my way to Nairobi, Kenya. There, standing by the edge of a lake contemplating what to do next, a community leader found me and helped me get to HIAS, which found me a foster home with a woman named Grace.

Grace, who was also a victim of sexual assault, had fled Congo after rebels took her village and her husband disappeared. She already had five children living with her when she agreed to take me as a daughter.

Grace always says, "The most important thing is that God has given me strength."



# NAME UNKNOWN

Darfur, Sudan



The last thing I remember from my life before the camp is that war broke out on a Tuesday.

I have lost most of my memories, but I remember that.

Sunday was market day, the next day we were warned that the war was coming, and the day after, it happened.

At the beginning of the war, many members of my family died in attacks on my village. Others died later because they were too old to run and could not leave and then died of hunger because there was no food. I came to the refugee camp alone, with only one friend, but without my family.

Here in the camp, we do not have enough to eat because there are terrible food shortages in the camps in Chad. Before the war there was lots of food – tomatoes, millet, mango—and we had lots of livestock. During the war, we lost everything.

# RAWAN Qamishli, Syria



Photo Credit: Taylor Smith / taylor-smith-journalist.com



Rawan is my 4 year-old son. His father, older brother, and I fled our hometown in Qamishli, Syria over three years ago.

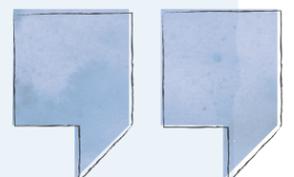
Because Rawan does not remember our homeland, I tell him stories about it every night so he will have a connection like the rest of us.

My husband fled to Germany last year, leaving the rest of our family behind.

Here in Akre, I work on the Castle Art Project, a program through the Rise Foundation that empowers the youth who live here to paint murals on the walls of our new home, which is a former Saddam Hussein prison.

With almost 3 million Syrian children out of school, this project helps keep our children engaged and gives them hope for a life of dignity and possibility.

Somehow, despite the difficulties we face, Rawan is just like any other boy his age. He is incredibly mischievous, loves to be flipped upside down, and takes giant bites out of your food when you are not looking.



# CARLOS Sapuyes, Colombia



Here in Ecuador, if you are from Colombia, they assume you are a drug dealer. When the economy is not doing well, we become the scapegoats.

Even though I own my own Chinese food business, it has taken me over 7 years to gain the trust of the community here. Since I fled Colombia in 2009, I have struggled to make my business successful, but now everyone knows I am honest and hardworking.

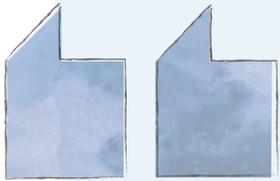
Still, the landlord who rents space to me overcharges me for the space because I am Colombian.

In Colombia, I worked as a farmer in Túquerres, where it was common to see the guerrilla fighters. One day, there was a massacre on the farm. The paramilitary self-defense group of the farmers killed the workers after accusing them of being part of the guerilla fighting group. My friend and I were saved only because we were hidden by the cattle we were tending, but, because we witnessed the attack, we knew we must flee in order to stay alive.

# KAMAL Afghanistan



Photo Credit: SideXSide Studios / sidexsidestudios.com



I left Afghanistan with my family when I was just a small child. My father was targeted by the Taliban because of his service in the Afghan army, which put our whole family in danger.

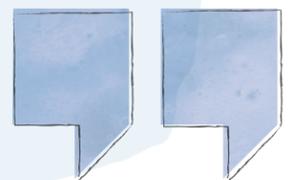
We passed through many countries—Turkey, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Iran. Finally, we landed in Russia, but we found little welcome there.

People don't like you if you say you're Muslim. I remember that twice they beat me because . . . I don't know why.

It took 17 years, many difficult security screenings, and a long vetting process before my brother and I were finally resettled in the United States. We found refuge in the most unexpected place: San Damiano Friary, a Franciscan retreat center.

Who met us at the airport and found us this place to stay?  
The Jewish Family Service of the East Bay.

It's really amazing—Muslims, Jews, and Christians all coming together.



THIS SUKKOT,  
WE STAND  
WITH REFUGEES.