



Annual Report

2011-2012

Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees— 20 Bay Street 11th Floor Toronto, ON M5J2N8 Canada

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Our Leadership

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Arsham Parsi

VOLUNTEER STAFF

Deputy Director: Danial Amini

Executive Assistant: Sharmin Olfat

Program Coordinator: Samaneh Riazai

Communication Coordinator: Rayan Maleki

Communication Assistant: Mahan A.

Database Developer: Stephen Weiss

Webmaster: Ali L.

Office Assistant: Sara Zare

Office Assistant: Noeman B.

Office Assistant: Mehrnoosh A.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Joni Serio, President

Panteha Yektaeian, Vice President

Paul Durber, Secretary

A. Irani, Treasurer

Johanne Gaudreault, Director

Hossein Moghtaderi, Director

The IRQR volunteer board of directors ensures good governance and oversees the appropriate spending of our donors' contribution.

IRQR Website: www.irqr.ca

IRQR Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/125495807546510/>

IRQR Twitter: [@IRQRTweet](https://twitter.com/IRQRTweet)

About Our Work

What is IRQR

The Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees (IRQR) is an international, non-for profit, queer human rights organization based in Toronto, Canada, founded on October 9th 2008.

IRQR's Mission

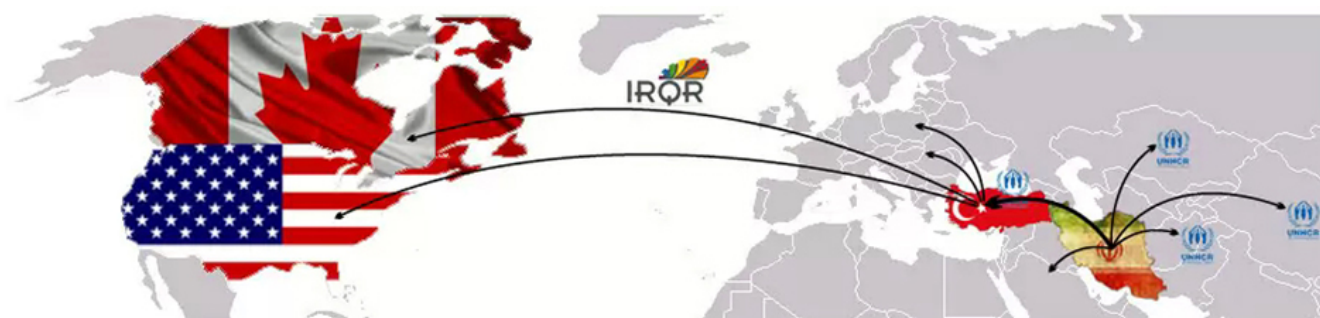
The IRQR's mission is advancing human rights for Iranian queers asylum seekers/refugees to increase public awareness of their plight and to provide continued support to them where and when it is required.

What does IRQR offer?

The IRQR exists to support Iranian queers around the world. Due to Iran's tyrannical laws with regards to the queer community many Iranian queers choose to flee Iran. In Iran, homosexuality is a crime punishable by capital punishment.

Upon registration, IRQR follows Iranian queer refugee cases at the various stages of asylum seeking. We provide support during the entire refugee process, and also provide emotional and practical support once a refugee is resettled in their new country. Many queer Iranians flee to Turkey, since Iranian's have no visa requirement to enter Turkey. Turkey is also one of Iran's neighboring countries in the north. Upon arrival in Turkey, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) interviews these refugees and decides whether their case for asylum is valid.

Upon approval, refugees are referred to a safe third country for resettlement. We continue to assist refugees throughout the entire process and even once they are resettled.



A Note from President of the IRQR Board of Directors

I have been honoured to serve as Board President of the IRQR for the past year. Although I've been involved with a number of rights based organizations over the last 10 years the rights we deal with at IRQR are so much more than basic human rights. We fight first for the right to live.



It's easy as Canadians to forget that so many of our brothers and sisters struggle every day for the simplest of rights, the privilege to be alive. While we worry about the nuances of our civil liberties these incredible survivors live in constant fear that their friends, neighbours and family members could be the one that turns them into the authorities.

In 2011 we saw the highest number of applications for assistance with well over 100 people seeking our help. In 2012, we are already seeing 6 new cases every month. These are not just statistics; there is a face and a family behind each and every one of these cases. I would encourage you to take a moment to visit our new website at www.irqr.ca and click on "Asylum Seekers" to read some of these heart wrenching stories for yourself.

On behalf of the board I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Executive Director Arsham Parsi for all his hard work. We would not have achieved any success without his tireless effort and dedication. A refugee himself, Arsham has a seemingly endless supply of energy, often taking calls into the small hours of the morning to offer refugees a sympathetic ear. We're also grateful for the assistance of our volunteers who support our administrative efforts at our office in Toronto. As a small organization with only one staff member these individuals are essential to our ability to operate.

While proud of our accomplishments to date, our work is never done. We receive no government funding and rely on the generous donations of our contributors to fund our efforts. Without this backing we would soon have to shut down. Please consider even a small gift of \$5 a month, as it could make the difference between life and death. For more information on how to donate please visit our website at www.irqr.ca.

On behalf of the entire board, I thank you for your continued support of our cause and look forward to another successful year.

Joni Serio

Board President

On behalf of the Board of Directors

Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees

Executive Director's Report

Let me once again proudly declare that Iranian queers do exist! This fact confounds not only the claims of President Ahmadinejad, but also other Islamic Republic of Iran's officials who assist the regimes brutal treatment of queer citizens.

Being a queer activist and working as the executive director of the Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees is not my job, but it's also an important part of my life. The name IRQR is most often associated with the Iranian queer human rights cause and it makes me more responsible for the organization and network that I founded in 2001.

I started this organization after two of my queer friends committed suicide. My initiative began as an internet-based chat group inside Iran, designed to create moral support for a group of gay men and lesbians living under a regime mandating the death penalty for same-sex intimacy. Over the last eleven years, and despite limited financial resources and constant threats from the Iranian authorities as well as some individuals, IRQR has become the voice of thousands of Iranian queers, both inside Iran and abroad. I am honored to be dedicating my life to this cause, working around the clock and tolerating all bumps on the road to ensure that Iranian queers are neither ignored, nor forgotten.

IRQR plays a key role in documenting queer rights violations in Iran. It also supports Iranian refugees and asylum seekers who are forced to leave their country, offers consultation to its members, and continuing its programs and projects.

One of our greatest achievements has been to make homosexuality visible in Iran, creating a public discourse that did not exist previously. We have brought the issue of sexual minorities in Iran into households and seminars, where it used to be a huge taboo.

By being a face of the Iranian queer movement and by telling the stories of LGBT Iranians, I tried to show the international community that in spite of many problems, the Iranian queer movement is very much alive and demands equality, dignity and justice.

Over the past year I traveled to Turkey ten times in order to meet the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee's officials, local organizations and embassies that are dealing with Iranian queer refugees. I also meet Iranian queer asylum seekers/refugees living in Turkey to provide them with emotional support and assist them with their individual cases.

What follows is a short review on the IRQR's activities from April 2011 to March 2012. I hope there will be a day when IRQR will reach such a level of success that no Iranian queer will be discriminated against, tortured, executed, or mocked, and when their rights will be respected by all. That day will come; we just need to keep on working toward it.

***Sincerely Yours,
Arsham Parsi***



Meetings with the UNHCR office in Turkey

In April, August, September, November, December 2011, and January, February and March 2012, I traveled to Turkey to meet with officials at the UNHCR office in Ankara. Over the past few years we have built a strong relationship with UNHCR offices in Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia and India to follow the Iranian queer asylum seekers/refugees cases.



The UNHCR office in Ankara has been extremely helpful in recognizing the urgency in some of our cases and expediting the refugee process. We continue to work closely with the UNHCR offices around the world to provide them with the latest information and updates on the situation in Iran.

Our Success

- Total number of applications from 2005 to June 2012: 570
- 50% have been successfully resettled in Canada, the USA and Europe
- 15% have been granted asylum and are awaiting resettlement
- 9% have been interviewed and are awaiting for their refugee status
- 13% are waiting to be interviewed
- 8% have been rejected mostly by European governments and they are in a limbo situation.
- 5% have been helped by the IRQR to solve their family issues and voluntarily returned to Iran.
- The remaining cases are either waiting for their legal interview or are at risk of deportation.

Campaigns

International Day Against Homophobia

On May 17, 2011, the International Day Against Homophobia, IRQR released an open letter that read:

“... in other words, many psychologists, and therapists are homophobic themselves. Help ask them to pay more attention by sending a letter. Print the written letter and send it to at least one psychiatrist.”

We have been informed that about 350 letters were sent by the end of May 2011.



Mandana in Cyprus

In May 2011, the IRQR launched a campaign to help support Mandana. She is an Iranian lesbian who fled to Cyprus in June 2008 and has sought asylum on the basis of her sexual orientation. She was

soon granted an interview with the office of the Ministry of Asylum Service of the Republic of Cyprus.

A female officer conducted the interview and the interpreter was an Iranian man. In her email to the IRQR, Mandana stated, “I found out later that the interpreter is not professionally certified for this important matter, he is constantly travelling to Iran and he has a close relationship with the Iranian Embassy in Nicosia.” She continued, “When I said I was a lesbian, they both laughed and told me to go back to my country and hide myself, since, in their words, ‘we do not have any lesbians in Cyprus.’”

Mandana has been informed that her application was rejected. During a phone interview with the IRQR she said it was “merely because I had been previously married and thus I could not possibly be a lesbian. But the Asylum Service Officer did not bother to ask me during my interview anything about my compulsory marriage in Iran. They have no idea why I forced to get married two times by my family and that as a woman I had no rights to argue. Moreover, I could not tell them about my sexual orientation since I would have been killed immediately for keeping their honour.” IRQR is currently working on assisting Mandana with her refugee application.

First Iranian Gay Pride Parade in Ankara

IRQR was invited to participate in the 6th International Meeting Against Homophobia in Ankara, Turkey last May. More than eleven countries participated at this meeting and the different aspects of queer issues in the region were discussed. As the result the Regional Network was initiated to monitor and document the violation queer human rights in the region.

A pioneering event also took place during this international meeting by KAOS GL, the Turkish queer organization and the IRQR. Iranian queer asylum seekers/refugees in Turkey joined the Gay Pride Parade. They attached the Iranian flag to the rainbow flags they were carrying during the March, raising their voices with slogans like “Ahmadinejad, we’re here!”, “Iranian queers will not keep silent anymore!” and “Iranian queers, we’re altogether now!”



Toronto Pride Parade and Pride Toronto Award

After marching in Ankara’s pride parade, IRQR inspired to lead a group in Toronto. On July 3rd, 2011, for the first time an official Iranian contingent marched in Toronto’s Pride Parade. About 35 refugees and supporters participated.

IRQR was awarded the “Best Entry of Dream Big Theme in Pride Parade 2011” by the pride committee. We look forward to participating in this wonderful event in the years to come.

International Meetings and Conferences

As part of my duty to raise awareness, I traveled to Paris, France in August 2011. The IRQR was able to participate at several meetings with local French organizations that provide support to refugee claimants and discussed the Iranian queer situation in France. Moreover, I had an opportunity to meet with a number of Iranian queer asylum seekers/refugees in Paris to make sure that they are being treated fairly according to international regulations for asylum seekers/refugees.



I was invited by Riksteatern and Swedish International Development Agency in October and December 2011 to speak at several Iranian Voices conferences in Stockholm, Sweden and Istanbul, Turkey. My speeches focused on Legal and Social Issues of Iranian Queers. Traveling to Sweden provided us an opportunity to organize several meetings with RFSL, the Swedish national organization and ILGCN, International Lesbian and gay Cultural Network, in order to create a professional relationship and possible partnership in the future.

In November 2011, I was invited to speak at the 5th Annual Cities for Life event that was organized by Amnesty International in Toronto, Canada where I talked about the death penalty for queers in Iran and a conflict at the United Nations to abolish execution worldwide.

In December 2011, I was invited to speak at the World LGBTQ Youth Leadership Summit in Tel Aviv, Israel. It was a great experience to be among numerous youth activists worldwide and share my challenges and triumphs as an Iranian queer activist. Moreover, I was invited to speak at the Knesset for some of members of parliaments at the Anti-homophobia Lobby meeting.

In February 13, 2012, the IRQR was invited to meet Hon. Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Number of IRQR volunteer staff, members and refugees were invited to join the meeting and share their experience as an asylum seeker/refugee especially in Turkey and Government-Sponsored Refugee process. The Canadian government has been very supportive of the Iranian queer community and ranks among the top welcoming nations.



9th Anniversary of Iranian Queer Voice Celebration

It was October 1st, 2003 that for the first time Iranian queers decided to get together and speak out about their situation. However, they were too concerned about their safety and security to meet in public. Instead, they decided to organize a clandestine Yahoo chat group to e-meet. We named it the Voice Celebration.

There were a total of 50 participants. They established contacts with each other for mutual support and to exchange views on how best to remedy the oppressive situation of civil and queer rights in Iran. Most striking for all of us was the fact that many of them were using false identities. Nobody dared to speak out publicly or under their real name, for fear of arrest, torture and even execution if the authorities discovered them. Therefore, our Voice Celebration was in fact silent.

September 24th to October 1st 2011 named the 10th anniversary of Iranian queer voice celebration week and its official launch party was held in Kayseri, Turkey. About fifty Iranian queer asylum seekers/refugees participated. A couple of Iranian queer families joined us as well and sent a strong message that they support their queer children. A number of Iranian queers spoke at the event and shared their stories. It was a great event and we are going to celebrate this historical event annually.

Financial Report

Note: The IRQR Fiscal Year is from April 1st to March 31st of the following year.

Statement of Activities

For the year ended March 31st, 2012

REVENUES	MARCH 31, 2012
DONATION	16,404.06 CAD
MONTHLY DONATION PLAN	3,798.14 CAD
FUNDRAISING	1,250.33 CAD
GRANT - HIRSCHFELD-EDDY FOUNDATION	17,610.23 CAD
TOTAL REVENUES	39,062.76 CAD

EXPENSES	MARCH 31, 2012
DIRECT FINANCIAL AID	4,684.14 CAD
TRAVEL EXPENSES	6,104.96 CAD
OFFICE EXPENSES	1,335.98 CAD
COMMUTE	1,580.95 CAD
OFFICE RENT	10,058.70 CAD
COMMUNICATIONS	3,480.20 CAD
ED SALARY	18,000 CAD
CPP-EI CONTRIBUTION	777.52 CAD
MEETING EXPENSES	1,122.01 CAD
EVENT EXPENSES	714.60 CAD
ACCOUNTING	300.00 CAD
BANKING FEE	299.03 CAD
INSURANCE/LEGAL FEES	441.00 CAD
REFUGEES DIRECT AID PLAN	2,716.62 CAD
MISCELLANEOUS	56.46 CAD
TOTAL EXPENSES	48,955.55 CAD

BALANCE SHEET	MARCH 31, 2012
FUND BALANCE - SURPLUS (DEFICIT)	-9,892.79 CAD
FUND BALANCE - BEGINNING OF YEAR	14,900.18 CAD
FUND BALANCE - END OF YEAR	5007.39 CAD

IRQR Donors

We would like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to all our contributors for their donations. The succession of our organization would not be possible without your support. We are honoured to provide your donations to Iranian queer asylum seekers/refugees who are in need of basic support.

We would like to especially thank Mr. Geert Oetken (Bonn, Germany), Mr. Paul Horn (Jupiter, USA) and Helge Tiller (Oslo, Norway) for being our their significant contributions.

Additional thanks must go to The Hirschfeld-Eddy Foundation based in Berlin, Germany for their continued support.

Adrian B.
Alex M.
Ali T.
Ali S.
Amy A.
Ana G.
Anika C.
Artur L.
Asher A.
Barry C.
Barry T.
Bernard M.
Charles M.R.
Chris A.
Christian B.
Christopher C.
Concord-Carlisle High School
Dana G.
Daniel S.
Daphné L.
David G.B.
David M.
David R.
David R.
Dennis H.
Dennis K.
Deschamps S.D.
Dijan M.
Douglas W.
Efstratios F.
Fiona U.
Elizabeth R.
Eric W.
F. J.
Farnaz J.
Francesco M.
Franchini C.
Frank D.

Gary T.
Gerhard W.
Gilles M.
Giulio S.
Gay and Lesbian of Salt Spring
Island
Hannah L.
Helem Montreal
Helge V.T.
Horst B.
Israel B.
Jacob R.
James M.
James V.
Janice F.
Jay T.
Jean-Paul D.
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Jon F.
Julian Z.
Ken J.
Kevin B.
Laura S.
Lillian D.
Lutz N.
Maid In the Shade
Maik D.
Malcolm M.
Marc K.
Marco V.
Mark B.
Marvin S.
Masoumeh F.
Mathias W.
Matthew TA
Mehnoush A.
Michael B.

Michael K.
Michael H.
Michael M.
Mike P.
Mina L.
Minoo Z.
Nathan H.
Nicholas M.
Nicol K.
Nicolas S.
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Sholeh M.
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Sourosh S.
Stephen W.
Stuart B.
Terry W.
Thomas K.
Unitarian Universalist Church
Wallace H.
Wolfgang M.
Zoltan L.
Swiss queer Community.
AND many anonymous supporters.