Voices for Change Conference 2026

Tentative Two-Day Conference Program / Agenda

November 27–28, 2026 | 163 Queen Street East, Toronto, Ontario | Hybrid Conference

Conference theme: From Vulnerability to Safety, Healing and Change: Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Human Trafficking Among Refugees and Newcomers

Convened by: Hope for Refugees International (HRI)

Day One — Friday, November 27, 2026 Understanding Vulnerability, Centring Experience and Building Pathways to Safety		
9:30–10:00 AM	Official Opening Ceremony Land Acknowledgement Welcome, Solidarity and a Shared Commitment to Action Premiering the Voices for Change Conference Video - "From Vulnerability to Safety, Healing and Change"	Lilian Aine Tusiime Executive Director - Hope for Refugees International
10:00–10:30 AM	**Opening Keynote and Moderated Fireside Chat with Senator Paulette Senior** ***Keynote Title: "From Awareness to Action: Advancing Safety, Equality and Justice for Refugees and Newcomers"*** *The keynote will establish the wider policy and human-rights context, acknowledge the momentum of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, and challenge institutions and communities to move toward sustained prevention and systemic change.*	Keynote Speaker: Senator Paulette Senior Moderator: Patrick King Mwesigye
10:30- 10:50 AM	**Coffee/Tea Break** *All Participants*	
10:50–12:20 PM	**Opening Plenary**	

	Session Title: *"From Vulnerability to Safety, Healing and Change: Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Human Trafficking Among Refugees and Newcomers."* *This flagship plenary will establish the conference's central analysis and connect all six themes.* **Purpose:** To examine how GBV and human trafficking intersect with forced displacement, migration, racism, gender, sexuality, precarious housing, poverty, employment, mental health, immigration status and access to justice, and identify what needs to change. ***Speakers*** ● *Sami Pritchard (She/Her), - Director of Advocacy and Communications - YWCA Toronto | National Advocacy. Community Action.* ● *Pastor Peace Nakayima Muruya (She/Her) - Senior Pastor, founding Senior Pastor of Abundance in Christ Church Toronto.* ● *Tanisha Sri Bhaggiyadatta* (she/her)*, Academic Program Coordinator/ Professor (SSW-GBV) Social Service Worker program - Gender Based Violence, George Brown College* ● *Zayanna Findlay | GBV Case Manager (She/Her), Women's Health in Women's Hands Community Health Centre* ● *Deepi Jatana – Anti-Human Trafficking Advocate - Victim Services Toronto* **Moderator:** ● Patrick Mwesigye
12:30 - 1:30 PM	**Lunch and Networking** *All participants*
1:30–2:00 PM	**Participatory Activity** **"Mapping the Pathway: From Vulnerability to Safety"** *After a short cultural performance, participants use Mentimeter to respond anonymously to three prompts:* 1. *What is the greatest barrier to safety for refugees and newcomers experiencing GBV?* 2. *Which support system most urgently needs strengthening?* 3. *What is one action that communities and institutions can take to improve survivor safety?* All participants
2:00–3:30 PM	**Concurrent Conference Sessions — Block A**

	Concurrent Sessions A1 - 2:00 – 3:30 PM ***Session Title:*** *"From Surviving to Thriving: Building Trauma-Informed, Culturally Responsive Pathways to Safety, Healing, and Empowerment for Refugee and Newcomer Women and Girls."* **Presenter -** Tina Garnett (She/Her): Executive Director, Jean Augustine Centre for Young Women's Empowerment ***Primary track:*** *Track C — Survivor-centred support, mental health and healing* ***Secondary track:*** *Track D — Intersectionality, equity and access to justice* **Concurrent Sessions A2 - 2:00 – 3:30 PM** ***Session Title:*** *"You Don't Have to Be an Expert: Notice, Ask, Connect to Respond to Trafficking Among Refugees and Newcomers"* **Presenter** - Eleanor Dhumbura: Human Trafficking Counsellor, Toronto Rape Crisis Centre / Multicultural Women Against Rape ***Primary track:*** *Track A — GBV, trafficking and forced displacement* ***Secondary track:*** *Track C — Survivor-centred support, mental health and healing*	
3:40–4:40 PM	**Fireside Chat** ***Session Title:*** *"Beyond Borders, Beyond Silence: Forced Migration, SOGIESC, Gender-Based Violence and the Journey Toward Safety."* This session will bring a transnational perspective to the experiences of LGBTQI+ refugees and other survivors of GBV, exploring persecution, forced migration, housing and economic insecurity, barriers to protection, access to justice, community resilience and healing.	**Featured guestS:** Nyasha "Masi" Zhakata, Executive Director/Founder of Pachedu LGBTQI+ Collective. Deejay Kathy, Founder Mmamba Queer Collective Co-chair: Rainbow Railroad
4:40–5:30 PM	Entertainment break/Coffee break and closing for Day One	Hope for Refugees
Day Two — Saturday, November 28, 2026 **Strengthening Survivor Support, Prevention, Community Leadership and Systems Change**		

Day Two shifts from understanding the challenges to examining what effective responses look like, who needs to work together, and what commitments can emerge from the conference.	
9:50–11:20 AM	**Plenary II** ***Session Title:*** *From Fragmented Services to Coordinated Action: Strengthening Survivor Support, Community Leadership and Systems Change* This will be the conference's principal solutions-focused plenary. **Purpose:** To identify practical strategies for improving survivor access to culturally responsive, trauma- and violence-informed services; strengthening cross-sector referral pathways; advancing refugee and newcomer leadership; and promoting community-based prevention and systems change. Speakers ● Lisa Duplessis (She/Her) Director, Programs and Community Services - The 519 ● Tope Olawale - Program Coordinator – Gender Equality, GBV & Anti-Human Trafficking - Hope for Refugees International (HRI) ● Jenna Dolly (She/Her), MSW RSW Manager, Community Innovations and Partnerships - Community Development, Strategies and Partnership Branch, Community and Health Services Department - The Regional Municipality of York ● Shequita Reid (She/Her) - Executive Director - Delta Family Resource Centre **Moderator:** Maggie To (she/her) Community Education Coordinator GBV) - OCASI
11:30–1:00 PM	**Concurrent Conference Sessions — Block B** **Concurrent Sessions B1 - 11:30 AM–1:00 PM** ***Session Title:*** *“Positive Masculinity, Consent, and Sexuality Education: Practical Tools for Culturally Grounded Dialogue in Immigrant Communities”* **Presenter:** Marcus Zacharia Founder and Community Organizer - Progressive Copts / Ottawa Newcomer Health Centre ***Primary track:*** *Track B — Prevention & Community Transformation* ***Secondary track:*** *Track C — Leadership, Equity & Justice*

	Concurrent Sessions B2 - 11:30 AM–1:00 PM **Session Title:** *"Epistemologies of Survival and Resistance: Refugee-Led Knowledge Production, Gender-Based Violence, and Mass Displacement in African Protection Regimes."* **Presenters:** Ester Nergis Canefe and Avitus Agbor Centre for Refugee Studies - York University ***Primary track:*** *Track D — Policy, Research & Humanitarian Action* ***Secondary track:*** *Track C — Leadership, Equity & Justice*
2:30–4:00 PM	**Plenary III** ***Session Title:*** *"Breaking the Silence: Human Trafficking, Sex Trafficking and Barriers to Disclosure, Reporting and Protection."* This final substantive plenary will examine why survivors of human trafficking, including sex trafficking, may be unable or unwilling to disclose exploitation, report incidents or seek protection. **Speakers** ● Danielle Warren (she/her) - Senior Manager of Programs and Advocacy - Aura Freedom International ● Jacobo Matta (he/him) - Anti-Human Trafficking Case Coordinator - FCJ Refugee Centre ● Uju Iwuchukwu - Community Peer Navigators and Volunteer - Hope for Refugees International **Moderator:** Danielle Warren (she/her) - Senior Manager of Programs and Advocacy - Aura Freedom International
4:00–4:30 PM	**Collective Commitments** *From Knowledge to Action: Building the Voices for Change Agenda* Facilitators present a synthesis of the two days, supported by rapporteurs who have been documenting the plenaries and concurrent sessions. Participants identify and prioritize recommendations under four themes/headings: ● Prevention and community education ● Survivor support and coordinated services ● Refugee, newcomer and survivor leadership ● Policy, research and systems change

	Responses to be collected through Mentimeter, QR-based feedback or physical commitment cards. The results to inform a Voices for Change 2026 Conference Outcomes & Recommendations Brief to be developed after the event.	
4:30–5:00 PM	Official Closing Ceremony Together for Safer, Stronger and More Inclusive Communities	

Activities Running Concurrently Across Both Days

1. **Voices for Change Community Resource & Connections Hub**

Both days November 27 and 28 | Dedicated exhibition room - 10:00 AM–5:00 PM

The Hub will remain open alongside the conference program, allowing exhibitors to showcase services and resources, facilitate connections, strengthen referral pathways and support participants in identifying relevant community services.

2. **Oral Poster & Research Presentations**

Oral Poster displays will remain accessible in a designated area throughout both days, with presenters available during scheduled interaction periods such as coffee breaks, lunch and transition times.