

**A Case for Support**

**Rainbow Railroad's #60in60 campaign**

**By: Andrea Houston**

While being held for 12 days in a blood-soaked cell in one of Chechnya's notorious "gay concentration camps," Max Lupanov was beaten with sticks and humiliated by police. Last year, he was one of the hundreds of young gay men and women in Chechnya who were abducted and tortured, sometimes for weeks.

The night he was abducted, two police officers burst into his apartment, grabbing him from his bed and forcing him into the back of a car, blindfolded. From there, after driving for what felt like hours, he was taken to a detention centre and thrown in a cell, where police beat him and demanded that he name other gay men, including his lover or "accomplices." When he refused, they increased the torture sessions, which went on for hours at a time. His captors seized his phone to copy all his contacts, whether they were gay or not.

"Every 10 or 15 minutes they returned, shouting that I was gay and they would kill me. They beat me with a stick for a long time: in the legs, ribs, buttocks and back. When I started to fall, they pulled me up and carried on. Every day they assured me they would kill me, and told me how."

Max says he was unable to walk by the time he was eventually released.

"I could barely crawl when I left." The groans and screams of other detainees continue to give him nightmares.

The next day, Max was on a plane to Canada with the help of Rainbow Railroad.

Imagine if all LGBT people living in fear could find safe passage to Canada.

## **Who we are**

Rainbow Railroad is working to save the lives of LGBT people all over the world, in a coordinated effort with groups and activists on the ground.

The inspiration for the organization came from a homeless Palestinian youth, who asked the Canadian delegation for asylum during World Pride in Tel Aviv in 2006.

Rainbow Railroad works to discreetly move people out of dangerous circumstances into safe houses and safe haven, often to a new country.

The name pays homage to the Underground Railroad of the late 1700s and 1800s that got enslaved Black Africans out of the American South and into Canada.

In 2016, Rainbow Railroad helped move 81 LGBT people from 14 different countries to safety, up from 29 people in 2015.

Just this past year, a total of 31 individuals were safely moved out of Chechnya to Canada during the crisis that is still unfolding, and has made international media headlines. But unfortunately, not everyone can escape. Rainbow Railroad has also facilitated the evacuation of about 40 individuals to secret safe houses within Chechnya or elsewhere in Russia.

“When I was in Chechnya, the situation was pretty dire,” says Rainbow Railroad executive director Kimahli Powell. “The state program was really designed to terrorize people. People were detained for 24 hours to two weeks, humiliated. It was really designed to get more names of gay people.”

And it's not just Chechnya.

## **A dangerous world to be LGBT**

Rainbow Railroad responds to calls for help from queer and trans people every day. Requests come from countries where LGBT individuals are targets of daily violence and government persecution.

Because of the high volume of requests, we focus our efforts on assisting LGBT people facing imminent threats of violence, imprisonment, or death.

There are still more than 70 countries that criminalize consensual intimacy between same-sex people. And of those, about half a dozen call for the death penalty.

Here's how you can help.

## **Saving queer lives**

Rainbow Railroad is the only organization of its kind. We are saving the lives of LGBT individuals in countries where they live under daily threat of state-sponsored persecution and mob violence. Countries where religious fundamentalism and authoritarian governments force LGBT people to live double lives or go into hiding.

A gift to Rainbow Railroad is supporting the liberation of LGBT people living in fear and isolation, who may need to flee at a moment's notice.

Rainbow Railroad provides funds to help individuals get to safe (or safer) countries. This can include funds to cover the cost of travel documents, airfare, and basic needs.

## **By the numbers**

Right now, Rainbow Railroad has more than 60 cases waiting for funding. On average, the total cost to get one person to Canada is \$10,000. In 2016, Rainbow Railroad funded 81 cases.

We can do it again.

## **Join our #60in60 campaign**

At this moment, 60 lives hang in the balance. We want to help all 60 cases currently waiting to be funded over the next 60 days. You can help us do it.

For the next 60 days, all donations to Rainbow Railroad will be matched by a generous anonymous donor. That's right, your gift doubles — so if you have been considering a donation to Rainbow Railroad, now is the time.

“We are able to do what we do because the community supports us,” says Rainbow Railroad executive director Kimahli Powell. “To everyone who made a donation, who spread the word, who continue to highlight the persecution of these individuals, we want to say thank you. We're all in this together.”

## **Ways to donate**

Rainbow Railroad does not receive any government funding. We are a small NGO, and every little bit helps. We are an organization built on small donations.

Groups can also work together to sponsor a case through the Canadian government's Group of Five program by raising enough funds to cover the average cost of supporting a refugee for their first year in Canada, which is a minimum of \$12,000. Rainbow Railroad provides support through the application process and resources to help integrate LGBT newcomers into life in Canada.

Farzana Doctor, Canadian author and co-owner of Glad Day LGBT Bookstore in Toronto, has been a passionate supporter of Rainbow Railroad for years. Farzana's generous contributions have made it possible for three individuals to find safety.

“It’s difficult to describe how wonderful it feels to play a role in helping someone escape a dangerous situation, someone who lives in fear, persecuted for who they love. Our queer family in the developing world needs our help. We have to do everything we can to answer their call.”

## **Safety at the end of the rainbow**

Those seeking asylum may find their way to Rainbow Railroad volunteer Gareth Henry, who himself is a refugee from Jamaica.

In Jamaica, Gareth was co-chair of J-FLAG (Jamaica Forum of Lesbians, All-Sexuals and Gays). He frequently helped people report anti-gay hate crimes to police. Thirteen of his friends were killed in homophobic attacks.

Gareth’s efforts to create change led law enforcement to target him. In 2007, a group of police beat him in a pharmacy while a jeering crowd looked on. It was the third time they attacked him.

Terrified, he filed for refugee status and fled to Canada, with the help of Rainbow Railroad. “Moving to Canada was an opportunity for me in choosing between life and death.”

Now a volunteer with Rainbow Railroad, he continues his work helping refugees escape to safety. In 2016, Gareth helped 60 refugees relocate to new countries, many of them Jamaican.

LGBT people in distress find us in many different ways. The most typical is through our website; some reach out through social media. Often there are language barriers. Occasionally local LGBT groups will refer people to our organization.

People like Lazia, a lesbian from Uganda, who was a teacher until she was recently outed by the media. She is currently in hiding. Ahmed from Egypt, who managed to escape police custody when the bathhouse he was in was raided by police, or D, a trans woman from Turkey and victim of an acid attack. These are cases we are working on right now, thanks to your generous support.

Think of how many more like them are out there, think of how many we could help. Join us. Together we can save LGBT lives.