

Interview with Haili, Eritrean asylum seeker June 2018

by Noam Cohen

Tell me about how it is to grow up and live in a country like Eritrea:

Eritrea population is only 5 million people but there are hundreds of official and unofficial prisons in the country. My life in Eritrea felt like hell. Fear in Eritrea is felt all the time. My father was in the army before I was born and I was very afraid to live like him. I knew that those who went to the army lived in terrible conditions. Dad served very far from home and came once a year for a "vacation," he earned 7\$ per month.

We knew that the soldiers in the army was like slaves, the army could take the citizens property at any moment, without paying them and without explaining why. Usually, soldiers come to schools and take the 17-year-olds to serve in the army indefinitely. In everyplace there are soldiers and they can arrest you for no reason, I felt they ruled my life. To get out of your village zone you have to get a confirmation in advance (usually you will have to pay for it). If you are caught outside your "zone" without permission, you can be put in jail indefinitely without trial and human rights.

The road to Israel:

I fled Eritrea at the age of 15 together with three other friends, I realized that if I stay there I would become a slave like my father. At first, we crossed the border to Ethiopia, it was very dangerous because there are many soldiers and dangerous animals in the area of the border. We arrived to a refugee camp of Eritreans in Ethiopia after 2 months and we stayed there for 5 months, we barely got food and we slept without beds and blankets in terrible density. In the camp we lived without any protection. From Ethiopia we continued to Sudan, where we met human smugglers who took us to Sinai. If we made noise in the car on the way to Sinai, they beat us. They give us water with fuel so we would not be thirsty.

When we reached Sinai, the Bedouins demanded 3,500\$ from each one of us. They abuse us and dripping boiling nylon over our body and calling our families that they will hear our screams and pay faster. I paid and they took me to the border of Israel and then we the Israeli soldiers stopped us but they were very nice and brought us food and water.

What did you think about Israel before you arrived, and how was it when you came to Israel?

The reality in Israel is very different from what I had imagined. I knew I was coming to a democratic country and I thought I had a normal life, like all people. I was sure that I would get refugee status, health rights, that I could study and finally, I could be free. When I arrived, I understood that life here is very difficult. There is no physical torture and fear like

in Eritrea, but I live here without any rights, even my visa I have to renew every two months. When Eritrean who lives in Israel does something bad, the newspapers and media says that the whole Eritrean community is not ok, I feel that it's makes people afraid of us.

Your hopes and dreams for the future:

I cannot think about my future, I do not know what the Israeli government will decide and what will happen to me. I'd like to go to university and have a good job. In the meantime, I study Hebrew and English.