



Finding Peace and a Place to Talk- the Story of a Victim of Trafficking

“When organizations try to help, people like us, they think that all we need is food and shelter, but what I found in the MRRC is a place to talk. A place where I can finally tell someone about the terrible things I have been through”, stated Aster¹ when asked what she thought of the services provided by the IOM Migrant Resource and Response Center in Khartoum, Sudan.



Aster, 22 years old, walked by foot from her hometown in a village not far from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to Sudan six years ago, her family had helped her pay for an Ethiopian man to take her and dozens of others from her village, all seeking to improve their lives, across the border to Sudan. Aster, along with the other women and men took the 8 day treacherous journey on foot through the borders of East in Sudan and eventually to Khartoum.

Aster speaks of how the same man who had made promises of safety to them and their families, would along the way be ready to leave behind anyone who was too tired to continue the journey, to them to die alone and afraid along the route. She spoke of how upon crossing the border, when asked for payment along the route, the man used the women were instead of money, and that seven of them were raped as payment to allow them to continue their journey. Aster tells how upon their arrival to Khartoum, at the home of the man who had promised to help but who had made their journey into a nightmare, his wife lined them up to have showers and eat. Only to wake up the next morning to be handed over to their new employer, a woman living in an affluent neighborhood in Khartoum. Aster speaks of how exhausted and overwhelmed she was. Aster spent six years working as a domestic worker in eight different homes in Khartoum; with some employers kinder than others. She found ways to cope with the sadness and confusion she felt, including for having left behind in Ethiopia her three year old son, the only good outcome of her short live marriage at the age of 16, and kept telling herself that one day she will be able to make enough money to go back home to her son.

Aster’s story is not unique; many other migrants, too are subjected to similar experiences after falling victim to human trafficking. The Migrant Resource and Response Centre, where Aster found the counselling support she desperately needed, was established In October 2015 by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Justice. The Centre equips migrants with information and knowledge to make informed migration choices, and provides access to services to address the immediate needs of vulnerable migrants. The Centre, the first of its kind in Sudan, provides migrants with a range of services, including psycho-social counseling, medical assistance, information sessions on the risks of irregular migration, and assisted voluntary return and reintegration of stranded migrants from Sudan to their countries of origin. Through its mobile response team, the MRRC also provides immediate assistance to migrants who cannot access the premises. At times, as in the case of Aster, the most important service is to simply have someone who is available to listen. The UK Department for International Development started funding the MRRC from January 2017, enabling IOM to expand the services to a wider range of vulnerable migrants.

¹ Name has been changed for confidentiality purposes