

‘All I have to say’

Separated children
in their own words





ombudsman

for children & young people

The artwork used in this publication is by young people involved in this project. Many thanks to Kitty Rogers and the Hugh Lane Gallery for facilitating this.

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About the **separated children project**

This publication was produced by the **separated children project** run by the **Ombudsman for Children's Office**. The project involved the participation of 35 separated children living in the Dublin area.

Separated children are defined by the separated children in Europe Programme as "*children under 18 years of age who are outside their country of origin and separated from both parents, or previous/legal customary primary care giver*".

The project ran from January 2009 to October 2009 and the young people worked on the project intensively during their summer holidays. The aim of the project was to better understand the lives and level of care afforded to separated children in Ireland by hearing directly from them.

There are three principal outputs from the project: a **guidebook** compiled by the young people, a **story book** setting out their stories and a **project report**. For copies of the other two publications, please contact the Ombudsman for Children's Office.

The Ombudsman for Children's Office wishes to say **thank you** to all the young people who took part in the project. You are an inspiration to us all and we are grateful for everything we learned from you. A very special thank you goes to **Leylah Mohammed** and **Ahmed Ali**, the Project Liaison Officers who did so much to make the project possible and to **Karla Charles**, the Project Co-ordinator who pulled it all together.

Foreword

Emily Logan, Ombudsman for Children

Through my work as **Ombudsman for Children** I realise that little is known about separated children and as a result they are not in the public consciousness and they are not high on the political agenda.

As Ombudsman for Children part of my job is to consult children and young people on issues that matter to them and to highlight these issues. Although I try to give voice to their concerns, nothing is more powerful than hearing their own experiences, in their own words.

We invited children and young people on the project to tell their stories. Some of them wrote their own stories. Others chose to work with a writer who penned their words with them. All of them are exceptionally brave.

With this book, the young people hope to offer you an insight into their lives and experiences, their fears and their dreams. They hope that if you are someone in a position of power, that you will listen to these stories and let them influence the way you support and assist separated children.

We hope these stories will inspire you, as the young people have inspired us to try and improve services provided to separated children living in Ireland.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Logan". The script is cursive and fluid.

Emily Logan

The sacredness of small stories

Charlie O'Neill, writer

Stories don't exist without the making.

We all make our own stories. But our stories also make us. In their home places, these extraordinary children were unconsciously shaping their own stories with their families when dramatic events tore apart their lives. At that moment their stories began to shape them. They shaped them in ways they never imagined or wanted. Now, on these pages, and through this project, they have become their own stories' tellers. That in itself is an exceptional achievement.

Stories don't exist without the telling.

That's when they rejoin life. Given the moving, traumatic and disturbing nature of some of these stories, the act of telling them is a profound feat of immense bravery and accomplishment. But to be able to express their stories in the form they have, with such honesty and power, is truly remarkable.

Stories don't exist unless they're listened to.

It is a lovely act of generosity for these young people to share them with us. Children seeking asylum in Ireland live hand to mouth. They have little to give away except their terrific but often fragile company and their stories. And these stories like their authors, are both separate and a part of us. Ireland needs to hear these stories. And Ireland, hopefully, will benefit from the hearing of them.

Ireland gives story a natural home.

Our wonderful literature, theatre, music and folk traditions have been driven by the power of story. Even today, everyday discourse is dominated by story. We're good at it. Making them up. Listening to them. When we went abroad in our millions we took our stories with us and changed the stories of other countries. People's own stories were changed by these journeys. So too was the Irish story.

Having met and worked with some of these children, I wonder will Ireland hear them? Will their stories change us? Will these small histories change how children seeking asylum here are listened to, cared for, supported? Will their stories influence how their futures will be deliberated on and decided? There's a chance to do the right thing by these children and mitigate the damage and loss they've already suffered on their journeys. Their accounts need to be heard by people as well as by systems. Leave sentiment aside – I defy anyone to read these and not to be immediately moved to err on the side of common sense, child-appropriate processes and ultimately, natural justice.

Think of how these stories came to be on these Irish pages.

Take a moment. This moment. Right now, millions and millions of people are on the move in countless locations all over the planet. The world may well be a small place today, but the vast majority of these respite-seekers will not journey far beyond their own borders and most will return to their home places. Only a tiny amount will travel to Europe and of those, in relative terms, a minute number will end up in Ireland. That makes these children very rare indeed.

If you are not reading this book at its launch but at some time decades into the future, the tragedy is, there will probably still be millions of people on the move all over the world. As now, they will be escaping natural disaster, war, persecution, famine or the greatest killer of all, poverty.

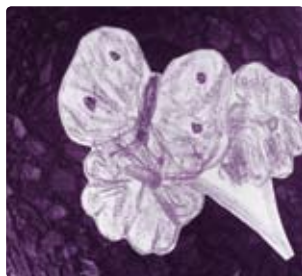
Sometimes, we can only hold the concept of these vast number of refugees in our heads by framing it as a collective idea. But each one of those millions of movers, refugees, migrants, safety-seekers has an individual life. Each one has a vital, unique, complex personality. Each has an unmatched set of feelings, insights, talents, flaws, histories. Each one has a sacred story. And when the stories are stories of, and by, children, they take on a different power. The hearing of their stories has a different set of uncomfortable and challenging implications for the listener or reader.

Most progressive political systems are underpinned by a commonly-accepted enlightened set of rights. And most civilised cultures are built on an informal premise that everyone's story, no matter how small or apparently insignificant, is sacred. It can have its airing if needed. It can have a humble pulpit in the church of everyday life.

Well these stories are sacred. And here is their airing. They are sacred to the children who own them. They are sacred to the children's home countries. And now, whether we acknowledge it or not, they are sacred to Ireland. To each one of us who reads them.

These are Irish stories too.





The stories



It is no way to go on

All this happened to me just last year. I am 16, just getting 17. I was 15 and half when things got so wrong. I was living with my family in a big city in a country in the centre of Africa and we moved because my dad has to go for work to another city. We were there for four month.

My dad was working, what do they call this? – it's a kind of job you know – a work in the port – when things come from another country. Duane, customs, that is it. He was doing this job and he had another job as a political man. The stories started there. But also there was a big fight, a fight in my country.

When we moved into a different city in my country, things got very badly changed. The area we lived in first was not too bad - we were fine, our family. Yeah, it is just a nice area. Our house was ordinary and ok. There was me, my dad, my mum, my big sister, two younger sisters, three brothers and one cousin. I'm here now in Ireland just with one of my brothers. We are alone from our family.

But in this new city something went wrong. It was in April last year 2008. My dad was there as just a worker. But the political group in this area was different to the group of my dad. They didn't know that he was from another party – that he was a

political man or something like that. They find this out. I think they thought he was trying to find out what the other party was doing – to steal their ideas.

When they find out he was different, the fighting started.

Yeah, they find out, because every time when my dad party had meetings in our house, me, my sister, my brother, we have to go and give shake hands to people in the house – most of them knows us and that was kind of dangerous.

So, before all of this, there was a vote in my country and these bad soldiers stopped me on the street because they know my dad he vote for the other party. They make me feel scared.

Then a week later they came to my house. I was alone. They were asking where was my dad. He had to go out, away, for this time because he would be killed. They were intimidating me, making me frightened. Then one man was raping me.

Yeah, then a long time later we were going to school. It's not like Ireland. We have two times for school – my brothers go in the morning and me and my other brother go in the afternoon.

So, we were preparing to go to school and people just came in. Very bad soldiers arrived in my house. And my mum was downstairs and dad and my big sister. We were upstairs, me and my brother, we were preparing to go to school. And they start bad fighting downstairs. My brothers were at school so it was just me and my brother who is after me in years. We hid and they were kind of fighting, asking questions, beating them. We were just hearing it upstairs, the screaming, shouting and beating.

We hear it all and my mother was kind of like, you know when they want to do something to you and you say no, no, but by force – they wanted to rape my mother – and my sister was trying to protect her. If they did, I don't know. They beat my sister by gun. I could hear the sounds, voices.

They just dragged my dad, my mum, out and took them. And I don't know what's happened to my big sister because when that happened we ran to the back door. I'm sad because I don't know what actually happened to her. I think something terrible. Like we just, we don't know if they killed her. The shouting men they took my mum and dad, and my brothers were in school – and we don't really know what happened to them as well.

Yeah, me and my little brother, we ran away to my father's friends and we were there for a week and it was dangerous for us. They were looking for us. They knew us. They knew there was more of us in our family.

When my dad's friends went back to the house, they find out that there was nobody in the house and everything was just wrong.

And I just ask him, where is our things and he don't say nothing. Where is our dad and our mum and sister? We couldn't go out of the house in this time. The war was still going on. They closed the schools. They were taking children and making them work in the mines. They were beating kids until the blood came out. In this moment, you just have to say what they want you to say. I don't know. I thought about all of this.

And next time when we went to our house, my dad's friend says that it's not possible for you to live here in this country – they are looking for you guys. He was trying to find our family and our brothers. He were just saying the bad soldiers was taking kids too.

So we travelled to his sort-of friends in another country and there we stayed for a while. It's just close to the city I was in. We went in a car, in the night – we couldn't go in the day because of the fighting. We had relations in our country but they are not close to my dad, so I don't really know them. My dad is always fighting with his family. I don't really know why.

My dad's friends leave us with his friends. I don't really know – we were just there for about a week. They took our documents and they said we have to leave the country, we have to go far away. We didn't have this passport – we just had this identity papers.

It was strange for me – because we never knew these people – just my dad's friend was the one who knew them and he give them money. They were strangers.

The place that we were in is a kind of a village, so one day we went to a city with him. I don't know which city. And I don't know what's happened there – we just went to the airport and we went on a plane to this other one, Dubai.

I don't know what's happened there – he was just showing papers. We didn't say anything. He was saying just you guys go and we went on another plane. It was just me and my brother with the man on the plane.

When we came here, it was just difficult, everything was just wrong.

We came to Dublin Airport. I didn't know it was Dublin then. I had never known of Dublin. I had never known of Ireland. We got on a bus and into the city centre somewhere maybe and then he just left us. He show us the place to go but I couldn't speak well English. I could understand some but not speak it great. He just show us a building from far away. He say you go in there. He said if he go there, it will be dangerous for him. He left.

It was really cold. It was in October last year and we didn't have jackets on us and we had just, yeah, a small bag with our few clothes and small things inside. We went in this big building. They got an interpreter for us. We was afraid and confused.

My younger brother was talking because I couldn't talk in that time ever since those things were happened to me in the

past, when they tried raping me. That pains, the pain never stop. I couldn't talk in that time because I was breathing too fast. My chest was very painful. My young brother, he were the one who were talking.

They were speaking in my language but my brother was doing the answering. I was sick in that day. They took us in a hostel and in the afternoon they talk with us in the hostel. I were seven months in the hostel before they moved me with the family I'm with now.

We are with a foster family but I can't live with them. It's just hard for me. I never left our house to go and live with other people before, and live in another place with other people – that is too difficult for me. I don't know how to do that, I don't like this.

They are saying my brother is not my brother. I don't know, I don't know. They said, they were keeping saying, he's not my brother, he's not my brother. They keep saying, they can't do anything for us, because we are not brother and sister. I told them, I told them – we are together, everytime together. I grow up with him, every time we are together.

Sometimes I just feel like doing something with myself. I feel maybe, my mum was wrong, to make me be alive.

They are strange to me and I feel strange to them. I have nothing more to say. I finished saying, I'm just sad. It's just hard for me, it's really hard for me, and sometimes I feel like doing something bad but it is no way to go on.

They let me see a psychologist. I just went there once, but we were meant to go again, but we missed the appointment. Just so hard, I just feel like killing myself, there is no way, there is no way.

I have friends but I don't see them often. I have no idea what is going to happen for us in the future. I don't really know. I go

to school here. I was in fourth year, last year. There is no friend in my school. There is people from my country but we are in a different class. But in my class, it's really hard for me, they will ask you things when they need help. When they don't, they don't want to talk with you. My brother goes to school in another place – he likes school.

There is no way for me, things are just getting wrong, wrong, wrong. For a long time I was searching my dad but couldn't reach by internet his email address. I've stopped looking now. I never got an answer. I don't know if he is alive. I don't know. I have a social worker, and I think he helped me with the Red Cross to try to find dad. But we didn't find him.

I would like to thank from my heart my social worker.

He is a very nice person. All the other kids want him as their social worker. He helps me. He always does what I ask. He never complains and gives me strong advice.

I have a good friend who calls me on the phone. She checks on me. She called to me once because she is living far away. I thank her too.

My principal at school she is great. If I'm feeling upset, I can talk to her or my religion teacher. I can tell them things and they will help me. And my Extra English teacher, yeah, she always makes sure I'm OK. If I'm sick, she worries about me. I would like to say a big thank you to them.

Also to the Ombudsman people. They are really great. I wish to make a big thank you to them. And to Emily who is very nice to me.

This is my dream if things get better. Revenge for my mother, my family, my dad, I don't know. I would like to be a judge, just feel judging would be good. In my country if the fight is stopped,

and there was no danger to me, I would go back there and live in a nice house. But I would need to have my family back if I go there. I don't know if my family will be there. Don't know if I find them.

But my country makes me scary.

That's everything





This sadness on all my long journeys

I am now 18 years old. I want my story to be written. I want someone to know what happened to me.

My life since I have grown up, I saw that there has been war going on all the time in my country. There was no real government. My country was been run by militia, and whoever is powerful – they are the person, that's how the country was run.

The big clans started killing people, taking their houses, their things. Every group had a name and every group had a leader. They frightened the town. They put road blocks in the street. They take money from people and vehicles passing. They kill people. They take women away. This is my country.

Every time people were coming to our house, we were tortured and beaten. Whatever we had was taken away from us. You see, there was a war going on in one clan and even our house, which my father build for us, they remove this from us in 2005. So when the war got too strong when I was two or three months old we moved to another place. But the war also reached us there. Even to a small village. So we went home to the big city.

In 2005 our home area was controlled by this clan. They took our house so we had to move and live with my sister. She lived in a little compound so we built some of our huts there and we lived next to her. But they also came to that house and terrible things happened there. I wish to tell these things.

The clan returned to our home in March 2007 and they did a lot of problems. They asked my father to bring money. My father said, I don't have any money. I don't work since the war started.

We were all there in the house except one of my brothers who was outside. They stuck my dad with a knife. So we all came running towards my father. My father say, don't come, don't come. We felt his pain and we came running to him. They killed my father. They killed my auntie. They killed my brother and my sister. My mother was left there. Me and my other sister were abducted. I was 15 years. I got a sickness since my father was killed in front of me. I have a fainting sickness.

**These men took us to their building.
A big place in the middle of the city.
They locked us up.**

There was some houses, some made of cut grass. They were also putting their animals in there with the people. So we had to sleep with these animals. There were other girls there but there was not time for friendship. Everyone was in a shocking state.

In the start they used to close us with a chain on the leg. But after a time they released us from the chain and made us do all the cooking and all their work. They used to beat us. They used to make us do all the heavy work. They used to rape us.

We had no shower. We could not even change our clothes. The leader of the militia had a wife who lived there. She would beat us if we burned the food and one time she placed the spoon with hot oil against my face. I have that scar here.

One of the days they all started fighting in between themselves. While they were shooting and busy with each other, I escaped. I just was running in the field. I didn't even know where any direction was. You see, I had blood everywhere from the cuts and the running. The skin fall off my feet.

An old woman she came in front of me. I was running and I did not have my little scarf. I did not have shoes. So she saw there was a problem. This woman asked me, where are you going? I said, I don't know where I'm going. She took me to her house. She gave me food. She asked me what is happening. She asked me, where is your home? Because in my city, everybody know every area.

She took me to my home. When I came there I found that nobody was there. You see, even those who had houses made of bush grass, once they started bombing them and shooting them, the little houses got burned.

We asked neighbours and searched. Then I found my mother in one house with five childrens of my sister – my sister who is killed. We cried on each other. My mother told me, there is no possibility in you staying there. There was no life for me here.

There were a lot of people fleeing the country. A girl who was a neighbour had a daughter who travelled before. So I went with her. You see, she knew some traffickers and they can take you away from your country.

So we took this big lorry which carries supplies and food and they took us on a long difficult journey to another Africa country.

We went across the Sahara. We came to this country and we were hiding in houses. We paid some money to some men who took us to the Sudan border. They left us there. It was a very rough road full of potholes. Sometimes there was heavy rains and mud. We kept falling.

The place is very hot. I have big pain from the circumcision. We have a tradition in my country – when girls are circumcised, they get stitched. When I was 10 years old I was stitched first time. My mam called experts in that area. An old woman she came and stitched me up. She will not use anaesthetic. They cut you with knives, razor blades and then they stitch you up. I don't know exactly what they did wrong – they stitch everything. They leave a very small place – for urine – very little place.

But while these people were raping me they used a knife to, you know what this means. So because of the tradition they have to stitched me up again and it was very painful. I was fifteen on the second time. You see, the place doesn't cure very quickly. I had big problems of pain.

I was told after one week, you are feeling better, you have to leave the country, go on this long journey. I had pain with this and the heat.

When we came in Sudan we had more troubles.

We were put in jail. They take men to the real jail. But with women, they lock them up in houses but they can move around. There are guards on the gate. It is an immigration place. We jumped from the wall and ran away. We went somewhere in the bush. We were hiding there.

One of the group, one of the girls, she can speak Arabic. She had been deported from the Arab countries. She said, I go to look for someone who has a vehicle and we can pay him to take us out of this country.

So she went and found somebody. This man came and took us and put us in his house. We were hiding there. He brought a truck – a very strong 4-wheel drive which could go on rough roads.

We went through a very rough road in the mountains. Sometimes the vehicle could not climb the sandy mountain so we would have to get out to climb. We came to a place were no

humans beings was living – the Sahara desert. The visions I have of this place, and what things happened there, are hard.

Our group were from many countries. There was no trees, no life, just white sand. We just are burned up by the sun and see only the sand. We were moving seven days and nights.

They put us somewhere in the bush. They put all together in one place. We were now eleven people. We were only three girls. The rest were men. So they took money from us and they say, wait here, men will come. They did not come back. We waited long time. We started walking, not to know where we were going.

We walked the night and when it became in the morning some very black men came who were very tall. They have scarves, you know, very traditional. We got very scared. You see, we thought these people do not look like human beings. My heart started pounding and I fainted. They did not do anything to me. They did not take money by force but they were given a bit of money for us to go.

Then problems happened when we were caught by men from Darfur. They were a group who are against the Sudan government. These bad men took all our food, all our water, everything good. They killed some of the people. One truck managed to escape but they caught our vehicle. They raped some of the girls. They killed some. They killed some of the boys. Then we were released and we went away.

After that, our truck got broken. The man said, I will have to go and get a spare part and come back for you. It was not normal hot. The sun was too strong. When I was too thirsty and very weak, I looked around. People had thrown tins on the sand. I used a tin. I drank my urine.

We were hungry, so thirsty, we use our scarves holding them up to protect us. Some are holding scarves and the boys are coming

under. We became very weak, falling down. We had no water, we were hungry so we became unconscious, we cannot move.

When he was away a lot of us went unconscious like this. When he came with the spare part, the man found us unconscious. He drove with us while we were unconscious. We woke up in a big garden with a lot of rabbits. He had taken water and poured it on us where we were lying. We just woke up. We were at the border with Libya. A place called Kufra. We find that some of the people died.

We buried them in unmarked graves because we were afraid of the government.

The man said the truck does not go through the border – I am not going any further – I will be put in prison if I am caught.

Then we were caught by the police. They took us all the way north to Tripoli near the sea. They took us to immigration. They said, where is your passports? We said we have no passports - we came from a country without a passport. They wrote things down about us.

We were put in the jail for a long time. We used to get beaten and tortured. They shocked us with sticks that had lights and electricity. I would shake and fall down. They lock us in a container. You know, a container of metal. I was fainting all the time with my sickness so when they see me fainting, they used to beat me. I was locked there for a month and a half. No windows.

You see when we were in the jail, there was a lot of people inside. Some people who lived in towns who used to sell drugs, murderers – they put us together with them. People used to fight. Even one prisoner died inside there because of the heat. So because of this, they removed us from the locked room and they left us in an open compound.

One of the days there, some of the boys were trying to escape and jump from the wall where we were locked. You see, they were using the canvas for closing vehicles.

The boys took that canvas and they were trying to hang it on nails in the wall in order they can climb and jump the other side. They told me you can also bring your pieces of clothes and hang it and you can jump the other side and we pull you. So, they wake me and say, don't talk, come with us. They tied my clothes on my waist and help me to escape with them. We did this and got free. I hit my head when I fell from the wall so I got under some vehicles to hide.

In the morning I came out from under the car and I went for a while. One of the boys who also escaped was hiding. He saw me and called me. This boy had lived in the near town for a while. He was working illegally and they put him in jail. He said, there is a very old embassy which is closed but people live there. He put me in a taxi to that building. I went there and I found the two boys who escaped with me. I think one of them was hit with a car by the guards and his body was there – he had died. I found someone there and they took me to a house of one family from my country.

They said there will be a boat leaving tonight but you have no money. If they accept to take you or if you can hide inside, then it is your luck.

This is how I got in the boat. When they were loading this boat, it was in the dark. When the man was counting the people to go in the boat, I was just hiding, going in behind people. The other girls they had paid so the Arabs were carrying them in the sea and walking out to the boat. I walked out to the boat but the waves take me. I am not tall. I drowned. Two times I was drowned, two times going down. Some boys saw me drowning and they came swimming and saved me and put me in the boat.

There was about 25 people in the small boat sitting. We were in the sea for three nights and three days. Sometimes when the sea is rough the petrol pours, and it mixes with the waters, and the salt

and our skin was on fire. In the boat, the sea was rough, we were sick, and sometimes all the water comes in the boat. Our job is to remove the water from the boat, otherwise the boat will drown.

We came to the port in Malta where all their ships were. Then a ship came to us.

We told them we are refugees. We told them our petrol is finished. We have no food. They said, we will give you food, we will give you petrol, but you must not stop, you go ahead. They brought us three jerry can of petrol, biscuits, water and said you have to go now.

We sailed the night. It was almost getting morning, we saw the lights of Italy. Yes, we saw the lights and I said Italy will give me asylum. Before we reached there the engine went off, so a helicopter came. They stood on top of us and they left. We saw a ship coming. We got inside and they took us. Two people knew the language and said we are people who have suffered, who came through the Sahara and long hard journeys.

**We were in shock after our sea journey.
The water had been going up to the skies
and we were confused and frightened.
We almost died.**

In the afternoon they separated the men and girls. They took 13 people and left 12 people there. They took us to a jail like a hall where they were locking us inside. They were police, people who were dressed like police. They took us to a room in this place with a very big door. A lot of people were standing in a queue. There were people at tables sitting. There was some food in plastic containers. We were taken to a place where there was so many showers.

They brought an interpreter who was speaking our language in a broken way - he told them he was from our country but he was not. He could not understand us. We told him, you are not from

us. So he said, are you not happy with me? We said no. So you see, he went and lied to them because he was protecting his job. He said these people are not from the country they say. They are from Morocco, Sudan or Chad. So I got a shock with what is going on. I became sick.

We were deported back to Libya. We were taken to a very big jail near the sea for seven days. Then they took us back to our country in a plane. I thought about all the hard things, the terrible, remembered visions, people dead, people tortured, raped, my sickness, this sadness on all my long journeys – I was back in the same problems again now.

I came to my home, I came to my mother. She was crying the whole day. Yes, I was happy to see my mam. But I was very afraid. I was very depressed. My mother told me nothing has changed, people are still fighting. The militia they are still raping the girls. I'm back to the same place where I was raped.

She spoke to my cousin who is in America – the son to my auntie who was killed. He was sending some money to his mother before she was killed. My mam said, you can see I have the five small childrens of my murdered sister here. Your sister was abducted, nobody know if she is alive or dead. Your brother is mad from all the problems he saw. You must go away.

My brother is locked with chains sitting here. They had to close him, they closed him on a tree which was near the house because he would do something bad. He does not know what he is doing. In my emotions, this is very hard, it's very bad. I cannot bring back his senses – there is nothing I can do for him.

My auntie who was killed during when my father was killed – there was money that was sent to her by her son in America. My mother brought that money for me.

My Mother wanted to use that money for my brother, but then the trafficker said, we will not take any mad person. My mother also sold the plot of land that was burned. She told the trafficker,

take this money and the money from the land and you can take my daughter with you. They told us they would take us to a safe country. He told my mam he was taking me to America.

The trafficker told me to use the name of his daughter.

I was brought back to another country again. I came through very rough roads where these road blocks are and whatever you are carrying is being taken away from you. We were beaten with iron bars from the vehicles. Now it was raining, really muddy, you can imagine the rough roads when it rains.

There are two traffickers involved here – the one who take you from your country to the next and the one who takes you out from that second country. This man said, sometimes it can happen in the airport that they call you in a separate room so make sure that you memorise your new name. He say, if you are asked who is this man, tell them he is my father. Tell them, I live in England. He even made me memorise the address that he was living at in England. London, something street number, I don't remember the address now.

The man gave me a little bag where he put some things for me. He bought me a trouser to wear and a little shirt and he told me, you have to leave your hair open without a scarf, because my daughter's picture doesn't have a scarf. I was wearing my country's clothes, and he says, if you go like this, they will know you have just come from Africa. I was afraid, I was so much afraid. I never knew how to wear trousers. I never walked in my life without a scarf. He brought me to a hairdresser who plaited my hair and it was very tight so I had a very bad headache.

He put me in a plane and brought me to another country with lots of planes, a very big airport where you get lost. They looked like Arabs. We were there for a while. We had food. I was put in another aircraft. The plane brought me to another country where there were a lot of white people. We were there for a while, and from there

we changed and came to Dublin. It took us two hours to fly to get here. I opened the plaits of my hair when I reached Dublin airport because I had headache. I came in Dublin in January.

He told me to sit in this chair in the airport and went to bring me food. I sat there from 7pm till 4 am but he never came. The people in the airport saw me sitting there all that hours. They took me to a woman – to a room – and she started taking my clothes and searching me.

Then I was put in a vehicle and they brought me to a jail here. They locked me in a little room with no windows, and a toilet is inside. I got afraid because I thought they were going to do the same to me as in other countries. There was a long bench but it was made of stone. They put a mattress on that. I was very hungry. I didn't eat for nearly 3 days. I vomited. I fainted.

They brought me a doctor of my country. I woke up while they were holding me. The doctor asked me, are you sick? I said, I don't know if I'm sick, I am very tired.

I'm somebody who has suffered, who has gone through some many countries.

In the jail there was a man and a woman. The man was very bad. The whole night he was threatening me. The woman was good.

They send me in a taxi. They brought me back to the airport. The woman followed me there. The woman and an immigration man had an argument. The woman took my interview document from them and took me to the Unaccompanied Minors social workers centre. They searched me there and they took me to a hostel were I'm staying at the moment.

Then in April 2nd, a social woman came and took me to the Dept of Justice. They took my fingerprints. By European law you must be sent back to the country where they first take your fingerprints. They said they would communicate with Italy. I

don't know. But they said I would stay in Ireland. So my case was not certain. They told me they would not return me, but they have never taken any interview from me. They have never spoken to me until now. That's almost 2 years now, they have not said anything to me. Nothing they have done for me. But I have just heard I have an interview this week. I don't even know my lawyer.

Now my life is different but still sad and difficult. First of all I am happy to be in a safe country. I still don't know if I will live here or if I will be taken back, because the Government has kept quiet for these years. I'm still living in depression.

I now speak of my life here. I live in a hostel. Do you know it is not a place where you have your freedom? Not a place where you decide to do what you want? You can not cook the dish that you like or even wash your own clothes – somebody is washing them for you. There is a certain time you have to be in the hostel. You get worried if you are outside because you have to be back on time.

Still even living that life, compared with where we came from, we still say thank you from our hearts, because we had a very bad life.

Every week, we get €19 and once a year you get €300 for clothing. You are not given the €300 in one time. Two times, every 6 month, you are given €150 so it is not enough to buy shoes, to buy scarfs, to buy a hijab, a winter coat, to buy underwears. And with that €19 euros you need to buy your shampoo, your soap, everything, it is not enough. Sometimes you might not be able to eat the food cooked because for us it is strange food sometimes, and you might want to buy food, you still have to buy it with the €19.

I hope to find my family. If my country stops fighting I go back and look for them. I hope to learn here, you know, the language very well and when my family come, to be able to interpret for them, take them to hospital. You see, when my family come, I would like to work, help them and help myself. This is if they are alive.

Since the government of this country has given me a safe place I would like to contribute, to work, to give something back to this country in the future.

I don't think of a relationship. Somebody, whose heart is settled, who has no depression, this is the person who can love, who can marry, who can do things. But when your heart is not settled, you can not love and do things.

I am still worried about what will happen. I do not want to go back to jail. Please do not make me, I pray. I am not sure. Up to this week they have never sent me for interview. They have never spoken to me. I have finally got my first letter from the government.

I would like to thank the Irish government because they have looked after me not like in other countries. I pray that nothing bad happens to this country.

Because of this, and the events, I have stress and sickness. I try to have normal life but I have sickness. I go and see a psychologist. My psychologist and my psychiatrist, they help me a lot and I would like to thank them.

I see doctor. They examined my body, what happened, my circumcision. They did many reports. The doctors told me to reverse the circumcision. But I am waiting on my refugee status. Because it will be no use – if I am sent back they will circumcise again. I live on medicines. I am getting very often infections. I still faint, I still vomit some time.

I am living with good hope that this country will give me refugee status.

That is all my story, I have nothing else to add.



How I Came To Ireland

Hi! I would like to tell you how I came to Ireland. You may not be able to understand my spelling very well.

It was my first day in Ireland when I start living with my cousin who brought me from my country to Ireland. I lived with him for, like, one or two months, but he treat me badly for no reasons. Instead of taking care of me, he treated me like a housemaids. He told me I'm not going to go to school and I was sad. I was saved by one of his friends who came into the house one day, asking me why didn't I go to school. And I told him how he always treat me all the time. Then he told me he's going to find me a way out and that is how I find my self here.

I really missed my country food and my friends and family.

My first day at school in Ireland was only a little bit good, cos I was not that happy, and I was introduced to everybody in my classes and the teacher, and everybody else in my school.

The most worst thing I hate about Ireland is people who smoke, and especially the young ones – it really bad for them to be smoking for their age.

That is all I have to say about how I came to Ireland and living in Ireland.

Thank you.



My English has improved a lot.

My Summer Holidays

During the summer holidays I went to the summer school in the VEC in the city centre to help improve my English. This was running for five weeks. During this time we studied English, art and maths. We also had time to have fun and go on trips. We went to the cinema and swimming.

Also during the summer holidays I went fishing in Co. Wicklow with my house. I caught three fish from the river. We brought them home and cooked them for dinner.

I also went for a holiday to Connemara in Galway with my house. We stayed for three nights. We went horse riding on the beach and we swam in the sea.

My First Day At School

My first day in school in Ireland was very scary. I took the bus at 8.15am. I had to get up very early at 7am. I got the bus to school with some friends who were living in the same house as me. None of them were in my class though. The principal helped me by arranging another pupil to take me to class and show me around. I found it difficult to understand the teachers and other students as my English was not very good. The teachers now tell me that my English has improved a lot.



This is where my uncle lives. This is called America.

I woke up in my bed without memory today. Then I had all these things running in my head the whole of this morning. I can tell you if you want.

I lived in a village in a country in Africa. Before the war started we had a good life. My father was a business man. We had a good, normal house. We were three children. We were three girls. Now both of my sisters are dead. I'm the only one living. They were older than me.

Before the war we had a good life. We were not so rich but we had our daily bread. Then the war started and things got quite bad. The war was getting worse in 1992. I was two years old.

We lost one of my sisters. She was killed. When they came to our houses, they take money from people and threaten violence or death. They abducted her. They raped her for a long time and then shot her. And then they brought back her dead body in front of the house.

Whatever my father had, it has been taken. Our house was taken away. When they took our house away we had nowhere to sleep. We used to live in a little bush. This means like a house made of our clothes, tents, boxes, metal – a shanty house. Whenever the war gets near to us, we used to move.

Why did these terrible things happen to us? It is because we belong to a small minority group – an ethnic group – who are kept down.

It is nothing to do with religion. They know we belong to this group because we live together. And people know each other. I know the people who did those things to my sister. They are our neighbours. They belong to a big clan.

It was very painful. It was a very bad time and I don't like remembering it, the situation. We were very scared. A lot of people were killed – we were walking on top of bodies. It was very frightening.

That war which started in our province continued. One week gets calmer, another week it starts. So every time we were ready to move. It was a very difficult life and sometime we had no food.

We just survived by hand to mouth. That area is an agricultural area, a lot of farms, so the farmers used to give us some food. We could be there for a week, depending with the war, and sometimes we moved to a different place.

That time the Islamic came to take over the town and the town cooled down, calmed down. We moved to another place and we again built our little houses. My father used to look for a daily job. It was me, my sister, my father my mother. My father used to go look for daily casual work and my mother used to cook some, I am not sure what you call it in English, some confectioneries. She used to sell outside.

Then there was a little war which came.

In those slums, where were the box houses we made, we had a secret place behind and girls used to be hidden in there. My sister was standing outside there and they came and found her there. So they come to the house and they say, if you do not give them

money they either abduct somebody or they kill somebody. They even take boys but we didn't have a boy in the family. So they abducted my sister. There was nothing we can do. We had no money. We don't know if they killed her or if she is still alive. The family was in great pain.

She was abducted in 2006 and war continued. Then the troops from another country entered my country. The Islamic was defeated and removed and the troops took over. It was then that the war became worse.

I never went to school then. I could not, moving from place to place and hiding. Since I came here, I can write a bit, but in my own language I write very little.

When the troops came, things became very rough. They were taking people out of their houses, put them in a queue, and just shoot everybody.

Yes, I saw it happen.

I'll tell you the rest of my story in general. My father says, since the two girls are gone and what has happened to them, you must get married. He had a friend who he used to do business with and he said, I will ask his son to marry you. I was sixteen and a half.

My father said, it is very important, if you get raped now before you get married, it will be difficult for you to get married because everybody will hear you have been raped. So it is better to get married now to avoid that.

It is our culture – if somebody gets raped, they never get married. It is a very bad thing. My father went and spoke to that family. But I refused, because I did not want to get married. No, I did not know the boy.

But he kept on pushing me and I kept on refusing. And he say to me, if you refuse, I will curse you. My mother has no power, only my father has power. Yes because in our tradition, girls

fifteen and sixteen, they get married. He told me he would curse me and it is so very bad if your parents curse you. One of the worse things.

It is a normal curse, but I could explain it to you. There is a belief that if you do not do what the parents asking you do, they wish you bad luck because you never listen to them. An elderly person say a curse to a younger person. They tell you, you will not be successful in your life. Something bad will happen to you. Some are cursed that they will never have children in their life. Some are cursed you might die. So there is that belief and younger people are afraid of theses curses from their parents.

I was very afraid of that. So they came and arranged the engagement. In my country when you make an engagement, already it is a marriage. It is like you sign for it. It's a religious ceremony. The day of our engagement we were shown to each other, we were introduced. We didn't know each other so I would not know anything about him. I don't know if he was agreeable or being forced. He seemed a nice boy, my father's choice, I had no choice.

So until they were preparing a place for us, I was staying in my mother's house. But then that war was there and he was abducted, my future husband.

My father was working when that fighting was going on and he was injured on the shoulder with a bullet. But when he came home he found men raping my mother. My mother had showed me a place to hide. I could hear my mother crying.

I was very frightened. I was afraid they would kill me. When my father came, the men left. But after a while they returned. They came looking for me because they used to see me sitting with my mother outside when she is selling things.

After two weeks, in the evening, they came in the house. We did not know they were coming. There were five men. They had army clothes on them. My father was preparing for his evening

prayers. A man pulled my hand. My father said, please leave my daughter, you can take me instead. My mother was crying and in panic. My father was pulling me and trying to help pull me from the man. They shot my father and killed him. My mother collapsed. I thought she died.

They abducted me. They were going in every house taking people. We were packed in a truck, men and women. They don't take elderly people, only people my age. All the men they took, they killed them. They took us. We were 10 girls. They kept us in one place for around eight or nine months. The place used to be a bar and hotel before. Now it was a prison. Whenever they abducted people they put them in that place. It is in between our village and somewhere outside the city.

They use to beat us and do what ever they want. We used to cook for them. Life went on like that. One of them will come and rape you. It was a very bad life.

The story continued like that. We kept on being the victim. If you tried to run from them they kill you.

One time in 2008 an Islamic group they came and attacked that place. While they are fighting each other, we got a chance to escape, me and a lot of the girls. There is places where you can slip down and get out and hide yourself.

We were able to hide in the high grass. We kept on hiding and walking and hiding and sleeping so they couldn't find us. We saw a woman who was collecting firewood on her back. She saw us and helped us. She took me to her house.

I told her what happened and I told her my mother's name and she took me to my mother. My mother that time thought I was dead. I found her very sick and injured. She was so happy to see me.

I have an uncle living in America. She looked for a way to get my uncle. The family of the wife of my uncle, they live in my area. So my mother was looking for them and then she found them and got his number. She told him the whole situation and she said, I want you to help my daughter. He told her, ring me back in two weeks – there is a place in that compound where you can make telephone calls.

So when my mother rang him he said, I will send you a man and some money. The man came to where we were staying. He said he would take me to my uncle. So I went with him. He brought me up to the big city. We took a plane away from there. He took me as his daughter on his passport. We came to Dubai. We went to another country with white people and then we came here.

He said, this is where your uncle lives. This is called America.

We got in a taxi. He showed me where to go and ask asylum. He said there is a man in there who will come and take me to my uncle. I did not know then that I was in Dublin.

I remember before I leave my country I say to my mother, if I have to leave, you have to come with me. My mother told me she do not have enough money to be able to go. She say, you are younger than me – you have a life and a future. She say, I am older than you. She say, go to the uncle and you can ring me when you are there. So that man lied to me and he left me there. There was no my uncle here.

The man took me to Justice. He told me stand here. He say somebody will come for you, I will come back. I refused to enter the building because I said I am waiting for somebody. He never came back. So they saw me standing there and they told me come in.

It was the end of 2008, October. I was so freezing. I had a dress only. I waited outside Justice for a long time. I was so afraid.

I saw people with a different colour, different clothes, different buildings. It was in the evening.

Somebody called me and I refused to come in. But people were going in and I was standing there and standing there. It was raining so I decided to enter the building. They found an interpreter for me and I told them all that had happened to me. Then I was sent to Social Work Department. I was on a telephone with an interpreter. I was afraid. Then they took me to where I am staying.

The hostel is good because I have not seen such a life before. I share a room. I have friends.

If I met someone from my home I would tell them it is a better life in Ireland than where I came from because there is education here. No fighting. No danger. They have given me accommodation, food. My best friend is here and many other girls are friends. We share our lives together.

I would like to be educated. I would like to work to earn my own money. I'd like to be a doctor and I'd like my mother to come here. At the moment she is being searched for with the tracking. I'm worried if she is alive or dead.

That's all.



I hope this year everything will change

My first day at my school was great. I really like the teachers and pupils. But when I reached the middle of the year it was a disaster. The students were rude to me.

In my school there is not a lot of black people – only a few; about 6 girls and 2 boys – and we are doing Leaving Certificate. Even now I don't get on well with some of the Irish students. I hope this year everything will change, because I have tried hard to get on well with them but it didn't work. Also, they don't hang around with black students. I haven't made friends with Irish students, only black students.

Their English accent is very strong. Sometimes I don't know or understand what the teachers are saying, but I have made all my efforts to catch up what they are saying.

The thing I like most about my school is that the teachers know how to teach. When you don't know or understand, they will explain properly to really show that you get what they are teaching, and by doing that it's helping me also to improve my learning. However not all of them knows how to teach well. Some of them only give work without explaining.

The bad thing that I don't like about my school is that they give too much homework and I don't get time to finish it. And also, if you are late for school for one minute, they will give you warning. If it reaches up to three, you'll get detention for one hour and they will post a letter home. Hopefully this year everything will change.

My school is a nice school but they have to improve a little bit about the school; the toilets are dirty, also the sink, and when you are really desperate to go to the toilet, you have to wait for the toilet time and that is not acceptable. In winter the classes are so cold and there's not enough heaters in the class. They are very strict about using mobile phone while you are on lunchtime. If they see you using your phone, they will confiscate it for five days. Also there is not a canteen in school, not even a big hall to do the assembly – they only use classrooms for speeches.

Ireland weather is very funny. In winter it rains too much compared with my country. Europe has four seasons but most countries in Africa have only two seasons, summer and winter.





My brightness shranked out.

I lost my mother at the age of 11. She also played part as my father since I never knew who my dad was. She could boycott the question whenever I asked her about him.

Death separates much. Since as I was growing I would have demanded an answer. Now I have a million questions left unanswered but I try hard to cope with the situation. Being left in a hostile place I had to agree to the changes.

My brother Eddie was in the worst condition since he was just new into the world. As young as I was I could feel the emptiness that was in place for Eddie and for me, lacking motherly love, being introduced to child labor and severe beatings was my guest and more to that – taking care of an infant – that was a new world to me even though I tried my best. As the saying goes – blood is thicker than water.

I can state that God gave me the strength at my age to take care of my brother Eddie in collaboration with school work and household chaos with my cruel guardians who looked after Eddie and I after my mum passed away.

Being forced into a situation that was so hard in my life I was exchanged for money and goats for marriage business without awareness even though I knew it at the last minute.

I tried to rescue my life which was not for long.

I was caught up and taken to their desired place (cohabitation) by my uncle and his wife.

Separated from my one and only brother Eddie, from school (I was denied education, my brightness shrunk out), and joining in into the world of touchier and death threats was the new page after an intimidative life. From the frying pan into the fire – that was the state I got into. Trouble never lasts forever. I got out of the terrible situation one day.

Arranged journeys day after day behind my knowledge just to be helped out to nearing the grave.

The next minute I found myself in a strange world where everything is different from what I knew, whether, language (English speaking through out), food, lifestyle just to mention but a few.

The most amazing thing that I found in Ireland are the three weather seasons in a year – winter which is extremely cold, summer and spring which I was never fond of. My country is warm through out the year apart from June, July and August which is our winter and is more like Ireland's summer.

The most things I miss is my little brother Eddie who by now he is nine years old. Thanks God he was not a girl – he doesn't have to under go an exchange trade. I also miss the weather, food and my friends.

I do say a prayer for my young one everyday for God to protect him hoping that as the saying goes – mountains never meet but people do – and having the sense that I should be responsible over him. I believe one day I will see him with my naked eyes. Miracles do happen since myself, I do not live in terror anymore. To make the long story short – thanks to Ireland and God bless her .





This land was going to erase all the bad memories

These are the things I learn in life through the system I'm in, being an asylum seeker. Life mostly has been sweet before, playing with brothers, sharing dinner with parents and family, sleeping in peace and thinking of nothing else apart from getting up the next day and continue with the enjoyment of life.

All of a sudden, something happened which changed things from bad to something which is still a dream as for now. I most have seen Europe on TV. Yes, it seems beautiful in a way that every body on my side will be delighted to visit it at least once in his lifetime. And visiting it once was going to be a lifetime memory of joy because we must have believed that it is a land filled with milk and honey, although we were wrong.

The land we (I) must have dreamed about a million times – and I was there. Although I did not come in the most pleasant way, but I was still there, thinking at least this land was going to erase all the bad memories. Although I knew it will never be the same again, but will be better, here was I in a hostel. I start losing my

mind and my dream came back to me the other way round. I have never stayed in bed until 11am no matter what time I went to bed. I started sleeping sometimes getting up at 5pm, 4pm, sometimes getting up just to eat something, maybe get back to bed. I must have noticed that sleeping this much was not a good thing to do for a young strong man like me, but it was beyond my limit.

The system is full of strict rules that must be applied. If you don't you're endangering yourself for things you don't want to happen to you. College was something I had in front of my mind, but in my situation I can't go. This just makes me more confused about the Europe I have spent time thinking about.

All the precious things in life seem to be too far to reach, although there is still great hope.

The people you love most, the food, friends, environment – all those seem to be a mystery. One thing seems to destroy the rest which means there is no joy, no happiness – only frustration, confusion and sadness, every day of life which at some point feels useless living. But we are people – not just people – but people from Africa. Nothing ever breaks them, instead things that can break them makes them stronger, and I guess that what I'm going through is not just for me but for the others in the system.

Somehow there is no freedom.

It seems like a jail but you have the opportunity to go outside. But the more you go outside, the more you get lost, because you see things that you would be able to do but you are not allowed.

What hurts most is the fact that they pretend like they want you to go to school. If you can finish 6th year, why not go to college? Because of the money. People can work for the money. I can work, but I'm not allowed. I'm doing nothing now. All I do is sleep, eat. Meanwhile I have million capabilities that can be manifest just in a second and things would change, but I have

no opportunities. I have learned how to be strong to overcome all these calamities and stay focused on what I want, because nobody has power over another except God. The power people have on earth is fake power. I have power too. In fact, everybody has power but in a different way. If you believe the way I do, then you have power to reach wherever you want to be. They can delay you, but they can't stop you.

Stay strong, my people, and use this ideal time of your life to explore whatever you can from novels. It will help some day in the future. They can take all but not your dignity. If you lost that, you lose all. Preserve that. Everybody loves their parents. You feel different everywhere you go, even when nobody knows you, but you know yourself.

You feel left behind – asylum is a mental delusion.

If you are not strong you get lost, or you start doing just the negative things throughout your lifetime. Some are already lost. We need prayers.

Politicians out there reduce social welfare on people who are poor and who need more money. But them, they are already too rich, but they increase their salaries and take from the poor, when it should be the other way round. People commit crime in the nation today because of them. There is nobody who wants to commit crimes, but somehow it seems to be the only solution to his problem.

LEX



Lots of eyes staring at me

My First Day In School In Ireland

My first day in school I had lots of eyes staring at me and trying to scare me, calling me all types of names because I was new and did not know people. It was mainly because I was a black man. Do people when you arrive the first day in school, expect other students trying to insult, or maybe call you any types of names. All you got to do is ignore those people or report to the head of the school (principal) and do not show them that you are scared.

Getting To School

To get to school sometimes was not the hardest thing to do, neither was it the easiest thing to do. But it was ok for me even though I had to get up every morning at 6am to go to school, travelling some 50 minutes journey in the bus. All you need is a dedication to do what you have to do and know it's what's best for you in your life. The weather sometimes was very cold in winter – but you still have to go.

It's hard to make friends on the first day in school and you might feel isolated, but we have all gone through it. You do make friends eventually.



I was thinking a lot

Hi! I'm 18 years old. I come from a country near the centre of Africa. I came to Ireland two years and three months ago. I had to leave my country for some serious reasons.

I do miss my family and I'm worried about their whereabouts. When I started school I was finding it difficult because of the language as my first language is different. With help in my school, I was gradually progressing. The principal of the school is very nice and told me that if I have a problem that I could go and see her. I made a few friends.

It is not easy living far away from my family and living in a hostel with different people. At first I was crying every night. I was thinking a lot and was very scared of what may happen next.

The good thing is that I made friends. I got to know people from different countries. The only thing I don't like about Ireland is the weather, it isn't nice. In winter it is too cold for me and the summer isn't sunny. In my country there is not winter – it's warm and sunny.



I held it inside.

I will call myself Sama but this is not the name my mother gave me. I have changed it because I do not want people to recognise me. I do not want problems. But I want you to know my story. I hope it is important for you.

I lived in a country in east Africa. I lived on the edge of a small city. I was one girl and did not have any brothers. I am an only child. This is not the usual in my country. Mostly they have lots of children. I used to go to a high school. My dad was a driver. My mum, she is a housewife.

It was not a rich area. It was not a poor, poor area. There was a war between our country and another country and many people they deported. Most of the deported people used to live in that place where I lived. The war was about land. My country believes it is a country for itself and the other country is trying to own it.

My life was not happy happy, but it was fine. I don't have much friends. I have my one friend, my only friend. In school I am together with her, and then after we would be together. My subjects were Biology, Chemistry, Maths, History, English, Geography.

I speak three languages but we have nine tribal languages. I do not understand most of these languages.

In a short time my life was changed.

The Government say only four religions can be allowed. Only Orthodox Christian, Catholic, Muslim and then Lutheran. Any other church the Government say should be closed and silent. Every church closed in 2000. Then if the Government caught anybody worshipping other religion, they used to put them in jail and punish them.

But my family still follow Pentecostal religion. The police come and break the door. All of us, we was worshipping. They caught all of us and put us in police stations. They arrest me and my friend. They put us together but they put my mum and her friends together. We were put into different places in the police station. I never see my mother from this bad, bad day.

In prison every single night, they used to call us and beat us. I stayed in prison six days. One day and one policeman bring me to his office. And then he raped me. He told me, listen with care – if you tell, I will kill your mother and everybody. I was frightened and not well.

One day, he come and called me over and took me in a car and he drive me. I was with fear. It is usual that you do not stay in police station long – they transfer you to jail. So I thought he was going to transfer me to jail. But he told me to get out of his car. To go straight to enter another car. And there I saw my dad and uncles.

I was so happy to see them. I cry, cry. My dad told me they gave this policeman money to get me and my mum out. But with my mum, the case was a more strong case, so they put her in a more strong place. She couldn't come out. You should know that I did not tell him what had happened in jail because the policeman said he would kill my mum. I held it inside.

My dad and uncles say you cannot live here because I escape from prison. If they get me again, I will not live. In prison they give you papers to sign. Papers about your religion. To say you will not worship in this again. They will say, sign this paper. Then if I sign

and say I will not go to follow this religion again, if I get caught, I will get big punishment. But I say, I am not signing that paper because even if I go out, my religion is important thing for me.

Yes, they were so angry when we would not sign. That is why they always beat us.

Some people sign and they go out. But they not going to stop worshipping. But they will be caught and they will be sent to a military compound which is not a good place. Many people die there every day in that place. They push them to work very hard works. I think I would die there if they got me back to prison.

My dad and my uncle take me in a car to a place three days away and I meet one man who was an agent. They say to me, he will help you. Just do what it is he says. I was seventeen then. It is last year.

This agent has false passport for me. He took me to a different country. I could not speak with him – he speak another language. We stayed there two weeks. He locked me in one room. He come, he give me food, he go. He come, he give me food, he go. Two weeks, no outside. Then he say, in his language, he say, eat, drink, sleep. Because my dad and uncle say he will help, so I say OK.

Then after the two weeks, he took me to an airport. We went somewhere, I don't know where, like an Arab place I think. Then we came here in Dublin. We were in the airport five or six hours. I didn't know what was happening. He took me somewhere, give me food and put me in taxi. He told the taxi driver something. He told me to go straight to the refugee office. I went to the Department of Justice.

They have questions, they ask my age. I told them and they say, OK sit down here and they bring two women who were social workers. They took me to another place.

They were very good, very nice for me. Then they ask me questions and they took me to a hostel. I came here last year. It is

a hostel for under 18s. And the next day they come and take my picture and ask me questions again about what happened.

First, I was scared to meet people because they are from different countries. It is hard. This life is so different to my life, my family, my home, what I know. There was no person here from my place. I was scared, scared. I do not talk in those days.

And then some of them came and talk to me. All of them are young, same age as me. They were nice for me. But some of them, they don't want to talk to me, they think I am quiet. Or strange. Some of them they say, you are too proud to talk, but I am not, I was just scared to talk to them. And there was no people from my country. I was alone with myself.

Then I made friends. I have three friends, one best friend, and we go school together. We go to church together.

I think the hostel is difficult. You have to sign everyday. Even if you are not feeling well, if you are really sick, you have to sign from 8am until 10.30am weekdays and 11.30am weekends. Because if you did not sign, there is big trouble. It means you did not sleep in that home – they think this. Even if you are in after that time, they will put X and then the socials will be very angry. They will say, where were you? And you tell them, I was here. And they say, no you have not sign in.

And I will tell you about the food – we are not allowed to cook for ourselves. You may think this is nothing but is a big thing. In my country we don't eat rice that much. But here, every day, every day – rice, rice, rice, rice, rice.

**Because they think every African eat rice.
Most of the people are from West Africa and
there, food is very different from East.**

Also, I will tell you about washing. We have not permission to wash our own clothes. You give them clothes and when you get

them back everything fade, everything fade, the washing is so strong. When I was in the hostel, some of the time, my clothes, I used to wash them by hand. I wash them in the sink, you know, because when I give them, everything fade. Jeans, I gave them one day, and the next day when I took it, faded and then old. We have so little money, clothes are very important. Six months, no clothes.

You can understand I miss so much my family. My mother, where is she? My heart is broken. My social worker, he used to try Red Cross but he could not find her. I was giving details but they could not find her and now they say my social worker, he will go to Amnesty International.

My mum was in jail. I would love to see my mum. I hope she is alive and not hurt. If everything was fine in my home country, I would go back there. I would study law. Here in Ireland maybe studying medicine is good. If you live in Ireland and you do law it's really hard to find a job. My teacher here in Ireland she told me, you love caring, so if you do medicine, you would be good at it. So maybe nursing or pharmacist.

I would have a nice house with my mother and family. I do not think of a family for me right now but I would get married if God gave me the right man in the right time.

I would like to say a big thank you to my social worker and to my two project workers. They have been very kind to me and they have helped me through big, difficult times. Also to my teacher who has been very nice to me.

I am finished now.



I don't know what to do to keep myself.

I don't have a father, just my mother, and a big brother. He is 23. We had room rented for money. My life was happy and normal like others. Then it changed, because of the religion. The government will not allow us to worship in our religion. There were only four churches allowed. All other religions had to disappear. You will be punished, put in prison, beaten. Terrible things will happen to your family.

If you want to worship you have to hide yourself. You are not free to do it outside. Even you can not talk about it to your neighbours. Because if they knew, they would tell the police. And then the police would come and take you.

We were living in fear. And yes they found out but we do not know how they found out. I was worshipping with my friends and they came and took us. First they took us to the police station. Then after that night, the next morning, they took us to jail.

My mum was afraid so she did not worship with other people just with herself. But me, I used to worship with friends.

I will explain the place which is a military camp. After you finish in school, after eleven, you have to go there. And then you serve – it is a military camp. You have to serve one year before you do what is called here the Leaving Cert. It is a terrible place. If they want to punish you, then they take you there. My brother was taken there in 2002 for worshipping.

I was afraid in jail. It is not a clean place. I have problem with asthma. The conditions were very bad. I was in prison for ten days. Because of the asthma they did not beat me. One policeman called me and asked me to go out with him and I meet my uncle there. My uncle gave a bribe. That's why he took me out and he gave me to my uncle. My uncle took me from the prison. I go by car to another country with a man. If I stayed in my country, I would be in danger.

I stayed in that country five days and there I used to cry at the man too much. I used to ask him, where are you going to take me? Where are you going to take me? Then he took me to somewhere, and after that he took me to somewhere else in an airplane, and then we came here.

I was feeling dizzying and sick and after I came here, he put me in one place and I sleep one day, and then he take me somewhere and he say, wait me here, I'll come back, I was crying, I was crying but he didn't come back.

I didn't know what I was doing. It was very new for me. I know that he left me a long time. Then I start to cry. First, I was trying to ask people, trying to ask lots of people, but I was speaking my language. So all of them were saying what are you saying? What are you saying?

Then in the evening I meet one boy from my country. I told my story to the boy, what happened, and that I was waiting for the man. He said, the man is not going to come back. So there is one place you can go and tell your story and ask for asylum. I don't know anything about asylum, what it means. He said now it is too late. You can sleep in my home and tomorrow morning you can go and ask asylum.

I was crying. I ask him to take me. I was feeling cold because in Ireland it is really cold and it was winter time. So different from my country. And I was crying, I was really crying. And I was waiting that man too long, and I was tired, I was really tired. Then he took me to his home and after I sleep that night, the next morning he take me at the door of Justice.

He say, go in and tell them your story. I said, don't leave me because if they say no. But he said, I can't help you anymore, you have to go in and tell your story.

Then I go inside and it was difficult. You see we went to school in a near country because we move there since I was three months until eight years so our first language is different. In this country they have different alphabet. They don't use a,b,c,d, and I use that language to write. They ask many questions but I don't know what to say.

They gave me paper and pen to write in English. I don't know why they want me to write so they called an interpreter. And they ask me too many questions. Then I don't want to answer them. I don't want to tell my story to them because I don't know. I was trying to leave and find that man, the man that brought me. But he was disappear.

They try and closed the door. I was trying to go out. The interpreter was trying to explain to me. But I say, I do not want anything, because they were asking too many question, personal

question. So I go out. It was freezing. I don't know to go. I go a little bit. I sleep on the ground. I don't know what time it was. It was January – this January.

When I was sleeping on the ground one woman came. I was crying and she was trying to talk to me. I just keep crying, I didn't answer her. So she called the police and they took me by ambulance. And she gave me something to drink. She was very nice. She bought me chocolate and some drink. I was so thirsty that I drink that drink. And she gave me her gloves and a bag for sleeping. This make me cry more, she was so kind. The police they took me to the police station. They search everything. I have only one bag.

After they search everything, they say go out and I was sitting outside again and it was really cold. When I came back, they said to go out again. I walk a little bit and I sleep on somebody's door. Then a women from that house says to me go, and I wait till she goes back in and I sleep on the door. Then the woman called the police and I don't want to talk to them. I just start walking. Then I was thinking to keep myself even. I don't know what to do to keep myself. I wanted to die at this time.

I think then I went back to Justice. They were trying to talk to me but I sleep. I was really tired. Outside it was cold. I go somewhere in the morning in front of an office – on the ground I sleep. I took off my gloves and put them on my feet because my leg fingers were really cold.

When they open the door I go inside then sit down. The woman was trying to talk to me but I just sleep. I did not know where I was, this time. I do not even know now.

I sleep that place. People bring for me food. They take me somewhere and try to make me happy. I was very cold, like my hand and legs couldn't move. They put for me a heater and keep me heated and those people arranged that I got a phone call with my language. Before this I was afraid to tell my personal story. But now I told my story and everything. They took me to the hostel.

I don't know the office but I like to go to church on the 15 bus number so I always see the sign there. It is not far from the police station.

I think when you leave your country, it is not the same, I do not know, it is hard to explain. I always think about my family. In the hostel, there were good for me. For my brother, they told me they are never going find him because in this military camp, no relation is allowed to enter. But for my mother, they told me that they will try and find her. I want to go back home if it becomes safe, my wish is that one. I hope is everything all right there. I like to work. I think I might like social work.

One week ago I was moved in an Irish foster family. They are very good for me, so kind and inviting. They let me live now for me. They take care of me but I have freedom. I have my friend also with me. The family has three young boys – one just two years and three months. They are great.

I don't want my name to be mentioned in this story. But I want to say one more thing.

I never saw again the woman who helped me that time. She was a really nice woman. She gave me her phone number in my pocket. But when they were searching me, they took off her number and put it on the table. And they forget to give me and I also forget to ask. I want to say thank you to her so much. If she not give me the clothes, I think I would die. I can't explain right about this.

But I want to say thank you to her if you read this.



Full of if onlys

Every day I sit by myself in my room crying my eyes out, feeling guilty, ashamed, full of if onlys; why me, why now? The room is filled with sadness and sorrow, not knowing what to do or where to go ... if only there's somewhere to go. For the last past week I have been to the end. I don't think anything or anyone has felt like me ever.

Well, crying did not do me any good, cos what I came to realise was no matter how much tears I shed or no matter how sad I get, the situation is never gonna change; I'm never gonna get back to what I used to be. My tears are not gonna change time, but if only I could.

In the last week I've felt no purpose, lost and abandoned. I failed to realise that sorrow was not gonna lift me up but only lower me under. They say it could get worse than this, but how much worse can it get from having nothing to live for?; knowing you can never plan a future. One thing I didn't realise before was that we take life for granted. Human beings are always complaining about something in life but one thing we all fail to realise is we can make today better than yesterday and less than tomorrow. We never realise the importance of anything until we lose it.

In the past week I have realised life is not ours or it's not for us today what happens but it's for us to see what God has in store for us. Only then will we understand the Supreme nature. In a blink of an eye we could disappear, and still have nothing to say about it. In all my life, I have never known true happiness. I was afraid of being too happy for I foresaw the tears I was gonna shed thereafter, and decided the happiness would pass. Just when you think it can't get any worse, it happens again – more and more bad news without any mercy. One sits and wonders if there's any good in life at all. From my experience, I will tell you NO – but I would not speak for others. As they say, speak for your soul. If I am to do that, there won't be a meaning to all this but then again we can not have a future without the past, now can we?

All this sadness happens for a reason I always say.

One thing I have come to learn is that life can get bad, or even worse. Bad things happen and I consequently believe they happen for a reason. I know now that all this will happen and I can't put a stop to it – the fact of receiving bad news – and the likelihood of living in sorrow is very high. Nevertheless even in total sadness it can not lower me to the ground. To add to that, I shall not lose hope and faith because this is when I need it most. So I have come to a standstill but this will not make me fail to move. I'll push harder till I can't push no more, till my last breath, for I have realised that bad things are eventually good for they make us strong. We need to be strong to fight negativity and there is no place for sad and weak people. Life is a battle and the world is the battling ground with us as the soldiers. We shall pursue till the end. At least I will.

Bad things need to be fought and weak people can not fight.

So bad things have made me strong so as I may fight the never ending battle of life. Don't be afraid to fight. Win or lose, at least I won't go down without a fight. No time for regrets. The '*I wish...*' statement is outdated. Get up and fight no matter how small the snag is. There's nothing like a small problem. A problem is a problem no matter the size. Fight it with all you got till your last breath.

At least that's what I'm doing. No time for tears, sadness and sorrow, or being angry. All that is a waste of emotions. I will make use of all this by approaching life in a different angle. We always assume somethings and say '*I'll do that later, tomorrow*', but have you ever thought '*what if tomorrow never comes?*' Start your war now. Start gathering all the strength you got. Sooner or later you will need it. Me, I say yesterday's problems are today's wounds, so how about working on that snag now, before it becomes a wound? Deal with what you can now. Do not seek the easy way out or run away from a problem. That's not the solution, but you are just postponing the problem for a later date. Why not deal with it now?

Fear isn't anything ... it's just air





For more information on
the **Separated children Project**,
or to request copies of the **Guide Book**
or the **Project Report**, please contact
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“ I thought about all the hard things, the terrible, remembered visions, people dead, people tortured, raped, my sickness, this sadness on all my long journeys – I was back in the same problems again now.”

