

My Torturous Journey through Libya's desert to Europe.  
By Fissha Hagos

We hear that so and so made it to Israel, Saudi, or Europe, and we think the journey is easy and our lifestyle will improve soon upon our arrival. Trust me when I say this delusional belief is far from the truth and the reality on the ground is completely different than we think. To this day, I continuously pray that no one experiences the sufferings I had gone through and had witnessed others suffer in the deserts of Libya. Dear brothers and sisters, my journey through Libya was horrifying to say the least. My life was completely dependent on cruel human traffickers. I had no idea what I was getting into when I left Ethiopia. I had no clue that I had to pay a ransom to these heinous traffickers to save my precious life. I had no idea that I was going to get exploited. I did not know that my survival would be at risk.

With my own eyes, I saw our sisters being gang-raped; many of our sisters were raped repeatedly. With my own ears, I heard our sisters' cries for help. I saw the merciless beatings of our brothers. I myself was tortured several times. My friends and I were too weak and too afraid to help our sisters. We were ashamed of ourselves. Our pleas for mercy went to deaf ears. We were helpless, and at times hated our existence. Life itself seemed hopeless. Some, who could not handle the endless tortures, were perished in those deserts.

To this day, I have no idea how I made it to Europe through Sudan, Sahara desert, and Libya. God must have protected me. But many were not so lucky. After ransom money is paid, the lucky ones who made it through all of those tortures were shipped into the Mediterranean sea on the small old boats. Many of those boats are outdated and should never be in use by humans. To make the matters worse, they are overloaded. A boat meant for 20 people is loaded with 100 or more immigrants. That is the main reason that hundreds of African immigrants continue to drown in these rough seawaters.

I just heard a sad news that our young Irob sister was one of the recent victims. She died in Libya. It is a harsh reminder that unless something is done, our youngsters will continue to take misguided risk. That was what our sister did. She was so young and full of life. Because of the lack of awareness, because of misinformation, she took the wrong and unnecessary risk; she took the wrong route and at an adolescent age, our sister is gone. I am afraid we will hear more of similar tragedies unless something is done. Because of the political turmoil in that part of the world, Libya is more dangerous than ever.

So my dear brothers and sisters let us take action before things get worse. These of us, who have made it to Europe, let us be honest and share our experiences. We need to let others know that taking the unnecessary risk through Sudan and Libya is not worth it. Our family and friends have suffered unnecessarily to pay for our ransom in order to save our lives, with the money that we will not be able to pay them back and they will never be able to recover on their own. Some families lost loved ones unnecessarily.

I do believe this topic should be a priority in IDA's agenda. IDA by collaborating with Irob wereda and Tigray regional governments should play a pivotal role in raising the awareness about this issue among Irob youth. These local smooth-talking human traffickers should be brought to justice. If this issue is not addressed soon, our young will continue to be the victims of these heinous human traffickers. Let us join hands and educate our young. Let us say enough is enough. If we join hands, we can stop or slowdown the trajectory of this mass exodus. We can save lives.