

20 Years of Human Rights Achievements

Hotline for Refugees and Migrants



HOTLINE for REFUGEES and MIGRANTS



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November 2019





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Authors: Dr. Ayelet Oz, Ellen Kuchli, Myriam Darmoni-Sharvit, Einat Fishbain, Shahar Ilan, Adv. Menachem Friedman, Ghebrihiwot Meles Tekle, Adv. Reut Michaeli, Prof. Galia Sabar, Sigal Rozen, Adv. Yishay Shneydor, Dr. Nomi Levenkorn, Adi Shneydor Willinger, Dr. Alejandro Paz, Rom Levkovitch, Evelyne Diaz Araque, Rahel Gebretsadok, Adv. Oded Feller, Ibrahim Saadeldin, Mutasim Ali, Adv. Yonatan Berman, Adv. Assaf Weitsen, Faisal Hasan, Elizabeth Tsurkov, Tesegezeb Gebremedhin, Adv. Tal Steiner, Jean Michel Bolima, Emi Saar, Noam Weiss, Dr. Ilan Cohn, Mary Ann Stein, Joey Low.

Translators: Elizabeth Tsurkov, Sigal Rozen, Anat Guthmann, Alva Kolan

Editors: Sigal Rozen, Danna Har-Gil, Emily Zoffer

Cover Photo: Malin Fezehai

Graphic Design: Ophelia Petrosian

About the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants:

The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that aims to protect and promote the human rights of refugees and migrants and to prevent human trafficking in Israel. We use client services, detention monitoring, litigation, and public policy initiatives to make Israel's migration policy more just and equal.

75 Nahalat Binyamin St., Tel Aviv–Yafo, 6515417 Israel

Email: info@hotline.org.il

Website: hotline.org.il

Photo by Yair Meyuhas. (Page 3)

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Preface

Dr. Ayelet Oz

Human rights organizations rarely stop to look back and reflect on the path they have taken.

The concerns of the here-and-now, the efforts to help those who need our intervention, anchor us in the present, to what still must be addressed and corrected. Our gaze is always fixed upon the injustices and harm done to the lives of non-citizens among us, who are permanently exposed to abuse, marginalization, and denial of their rights as human beings.

Thus, we sometimes need to cling to random and artificial dates in the midst of our busy lives, to turn our gaze away from the ongoing struggle and look back at the headway we have already made. We stop and appreciate, even for just a moment, the accomplishments we have achieved along the way, the results of determination, professionalism, dedication and above all, endless stubbornness in the defense of human beings solely due to their humanity.

The book before you examines, in the first person and through the eyes of those working in the field, the first twenty years of the activism of the **Hotline for Refugees and Migrants (HRM)**. It tells the story of the volunteers, staff, clients and partners who have taken part in the struggles and achievements that have defined the HRM for the past twenty years. The stories are numerous and diverse – they deal with many different communities, from women who survived sex trafficking and were invisible in the eyes of Israeli authorities and the Israeli public, to asylum seekers and refugees who were and remain the object of an unprecedented attack by the State over the past decade, carried out through various laws and regulations. The tools used by the Hotline in the struggle have varied, as has the nature of the effort in each individual cause.

What unites the different struggles described in this book is the insistence, by all of the Hotline's women and men, on recognizing the humanity of migrants and refugees in Israel and placing this recognition at the heart of the organization's activism. You may say, "But this is obvious, for each person was created in God's image." However – and I write this with a sense of pain – if there is one common thread that runs through all the abuses and harm experienced by migrants and refugees in Israel, it is the denial of their humanity. Reality shows us how easy it is

to deny the humanity of other human beings, just because they look different or speak an unfamiliar language, just because they lack legal status, just because they are foreigners, just because they are not "us." How easy it is to avoid hearing the cries of those whose voices are too weak to be heard.

The duty of the HRM, since its establishment and until today, is to amplify the voices of those who are often ignored. Through highly professional grassroots activism, legal work and public advocacy, we strengthen the voices of those who are silenced in Israeli society, forcing the public, policymakers and courts to listen to them. And when their cry is heard, we eventually achieve success, of which we have had many.

This year, the HRM marks not only twenty years of activism; it also marks twenty years of changing reality on the ground. Twenty years of battles that once appeared hopeless, but thanks to determination and unwavering commitment to the struggle, have led to significant changes in Israel's policies and recognition of the human rights of refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and human trafficking victims. We cannot deny that this struggle is still far from complete, and that many in Israel continue to view asylum seekers and refugees as mere objects, denying their humanity. But as we were able to defeat those forces in the past, we will overcome them in the future as well. Our commitment to the struggle and belief in human beings will be victorious.

This book is dedicated to all those who have taken part in the struggle to defend the rights of refugees and migrants in Israel, and to the women and men who turned to the HRM in their distress and put their trust in us. This trust has been our source of strength and legitimacy over the past twenty years, and will remain the bedrock of our work in the future.

Dr. Ayelet Oz is the Executive Director of the HRM.

**Protest against the deportation of children of migrant workers.
Photo by Yair Meyuhas. (Pages 9-10)**



האם זהו "לבד זה אינו"
הוא קטנה יותר, כי זהו
הקטנה זה קטנה יותר, כי זהו
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From the Chairwoman of the Board of Directors of the HRM

Ellen Kuchli

We are marking 20 years of work of the wonderful organization that is the Hotline, of which I have been a part for nearly 19 years.

I came to the Hotline after reading a series of articles in the newspaper "Ha'ir" (The City) about the poor state of migrant workers in Tel Aviv. I looked for a way to help and discovered that there is an organization fighting to promote and defend the rights of this population.

In my first meeting at the Hotline, I met an energized, professional, well-organized team of women volunteers. I was impressed with their dedication and immediately decided to be part of the organization. In that meeting I was assigned a shift to assist the clients of the Hotline's Crisis Intervention Center. A few days later, I was sitting in a small office on HaHashmal Street in Tel Aviv, along with a more experienced volunteer who provided me with an in-depth overview of the issues we tackle and how to handle the numerous and various requests we receive. Later, I began to handle the appeals of migrants calling from prison on my own.

Over the years, I continued volunteering at the Crisis Intervention Center and accompanied people who required our assistance in appointments at the Ministry of Interior, the police and any other such instances. After becoming more familiar with the system, I joined the Hotline's Oversight Committee, and later was elected to the Board of Governors.

A few years ago, I was appointed Chairwoman of the Board of Directors, a role I proudly continue to play to this day.

I have seen the Hotline grow from an organization working out of two small rooms and largely comprised of volunteers, with only two, poorly paid employees, to a professional organization leading the field, with about twenty paid staff members and an impressive network of volunteers.

I am proud of every accomplishment of the Hotline and its ability to impact Israeli society. I have been blessed to be part of an amazing group of people who are defending marginalized communities whose voices, without our activity, may not be heard.

I am engaged in volunteer activities elsewhere as well, but the Hotline for Refugees and Migrant has become an integral part of my life. The friends I have made during my years at the Hotline have become my second family, and they enrich my life immensely.

I wish the Hotline continued fruitful work in assisting a wide range of different communities. I hope we will be able, all of us together, to turn the State of Israel into a land which welcomes the Other and the Different, a place that respects a person's rights regardless of the color of their skin.

Ellen Kuchli has been Chairwoman of the HRM's Board of Directors since 2012 and an activist with the Hotline since 2002. By profession, Ellen is an urban designer.



Reception hours at the HRM. Photo by Tomer Appelbaum.

Protest against the deportation of refugees to third countries.

Photo by Yair Meyuhas. (pages 13-14)

לגירוש!

רוצה לקלוט פליטים!

הגילוי!
מזל טוב!



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רוש
!

The Birth of an Organization

Myriam Darmoni Sharvit, the First Chairwoman of the HRM's Board of Directors

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

Twenty years have passed. The first meeting was held in the offices of Kav LaOved, at the time located in an old building on Allenby Street. We were twenty, maybe thirty, women and men. The acoustics were awful, probably because of the high ceiling and the dim noise of the busses in the street. But it did not bother us. We had found each other, those of us who could see the invisible people in our midst. I remember the wonderful feeling that overtook me at the end of the meeting: the belief that together, out of a deep commitment to human rights, we have the ability to lessen the suffering of those in distress, and thus to change Israeli society for the better.

Twenty years have passed. That meeting was the first time I left the house after giving birth to my son, Hillel. What propelled me to come on that humid August night? An inexplicable sense of urgency. I did not know then that for 13 years, the Hotline would become such an integral part of my life. The Hotline was a wonderful training camp in activism, together with Sigal, Lilia, Shevy, Itamar, Nomi, Ella, Emi, Galia, Idan, Shai and many other wonderful people, who came and simply decided, against all odds, to pursue justice for migrant workers and victims of human trafficking.

The naiveté of the group paid off. Soon enough, we were taken seriously by the authorities. They let us enter prisons where, without any judicial oversight, migrant workers and women trafficked for sex work were held. Just two months later, they listened to what we had to say during Knesset committee hearings. As we gathered more information, we began to realize just how poorly the State treated migrant workers and young women, the ones with lifeless eyes, who are summarily deported after short stints at Neve Tirtza Prison.

Over the years, we experienced a great deal of frustration and hopelessness, but the belief in human rights kept pushing us to accumulate additional victories that improved the lives of migrant workers, victims of human trafficking, children of migrant workers, unaccompanied minors and refugees. In March 2009, the Hotline was given an award by the President of Israel for our work combatting human trafficking, the first year such an award was given. The representatives of the Hotline attended the ceremony and listened to speeches by senior politicians. Our excitement was palpable. I felt that "the few who marched before the masses," as the President had put it, were finally gaining recognition.

"Employees and volunteers of the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants - with your care and endless dedication, you have brought light into the dark world of exploited foreigners. You have informed them of their rights. You have fought for them before State authorities and delivered them from hardship... the State of Israel is blessed by your existence." (President of Israel Shimon Peres during the ceremony awarding the Hotline for our work countering human trafficking, March 29, 2009).

The Hotline deserves the praise it won for its dogged work to advanced human rights. The organization reminded the government and Israeli society as a whole, of the teaching in the Torah:

"The stranger who dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt... (Leviticus, 19:34).

Myriam Darmoni Sharvit is one of the founders of the HRM, and served as its Chairwoman of the Board of Directors from 1999 to 2012. Myriam is the Head of Civic Education and Coexistence and Social Education at the Center for Educational Technology.



Hotline staff, 2013. Photo by Tomer Appelbaum.



מדינת ישראל

עיסור המחבק בסחר בבני אדם לשנת תשס"ח

מוענק על-ידי
נשיא המדינה

למוקד סיוע לעובדים זרים

על תרומתו המכרעת למחבק בסחר בבני אדם למטרת זכות ועבודות. המוקד היה מהחלוצים ההולכים לפני המחנה בדיהוי התופעה, בהעלאת המודעות הציבורית אליה, במתן סיוע לנפגעי העבירה ובקידום מחקר, חקיקה ופסיקה עקרוניים. השפעת עובדי המוקד על מדיניות המחבק בסחר בבני אדם היא הרבה מעבר ממספר עובדיו ומתנדביו.

"הנה שָׁכֵחַ אֵל וּפָשָׁעָיו אֶפְנִי".

(ישעיהו סב' פסוק יח')

שר המשפטים

נשיא המדינה
שמעון פרס

ראש הממשלה



People for Whom Giving Up is Not an Option

Einat Fishbain

There are few moments in a journalist's career when she truly succeeds in impacting the world. For the most part, in the best-case scenario, we journalists increase awareness, slightly shift public opinion, or set the topic that will be the talk of the town for a day or two. But in this case, I had the pleasure of affecting the day-to-day lives of human beings.

In 1998, when I worked at the Ha'ir newspaper writing a relatively new column about foreign workers, my colleagues and I opened a straight-to-voicemail hotline (yes, that ancient technology) for foreign workers in prison. As far as we knew, the Israeli Prison Services prevented access for detainees in its facilities and to foreigners in particular.

In each report, we encouraged workers to reach out through the hotline; I was responsible for collecting the heartbreaking messages. Desperate voices in African-accented English or eastern European languages I did not know asked us to reach them in prison because they had no idea what to do or when they would get out. There were also a few hate messages for me. Whatever. That hotline planted the seed of the event we are marking now when three women reached out: Yehudit Ilani, Myriam Darmoni Sharvit, and Sigal Rozen. They asked how they could help the people in the articles. I had no answers, so I introduced them to each other, and later more volunteers joined. Together they established the Hotline for Migrant Workers, later the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants. It was a tiny organization trying to reach a place no one had been able to penetrate before – Ma'asiyau Prison, where foreigners were held.

Take a moment to think about a person sitting in prison for months or years, without trial, outside the purview of the law, where no one in the entire world cares for him. And after he has lost hope, someone comes to him in prison and explains that from now on, they will fight for his life. They not only promise, but deliver: a miracle. Since then, this miracle happened to thousands of migrants, asylum seekers, and human trafficking victims. A miracle has happened to us as well, with our veil of ignorance about the foreign community lifted through the work of this group.

The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, that tiny organization, now leads the efforts to combat human trafficking in Israel and is fighting to advance the rights of migrants and refugees. There is no place, in Israel or around the world, that this organization cannot reach, from the U.S. Department of State to Saharonim Prison and Holot Detention Center in southern Israel. Holot was finally shut down, and the stain from our conscience removed, thanks to a protracted legal battle waged by this group. The most noticeable thing about Hotline staff is that they simply refuse to give up. Quitting is not an option for them. This is the only way to explain their success against all odds.

Even when government policy toward foreigners (including migrant workers with or without documentation and asylum seekers) continues to be terrible, even when for every step forward there are two steps back, even when the hate cultivated by the government seeps into the minds of Israelis, even on days when a person does not want to believe that her country that so terribly mistreats those who desperately seek refuge— human rights organizations continue to march forward, and they are able to leave a mark.

In the late 1990s, the Hotline joined Kav LaOved, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), and Physicians for Human Rights, then the only NGOs assisting foreigners. Over the years, this quartet was joined by many others, both international groups and local organizations of migrant workers or asylum seekers. All of these organizations together provide what the State of Israel refuses to give: a rational, legally sound approach, relying on a broad view of one of the most complex issues the State should be tackling. Together, they stand against the incitement, grave human rights abuses, and the tendency to look away as they try to change policy, or at the very least, save the lives of individuals affected by these abusive policies.

Because I detest clichés, I will try to avoid worn-out phrases describing the type of work these people do, and I will simply say that they restore the dignity and humanity of all Israelis.

I think back to the moment when I sat and interviewed a young Eritrean woman, raped in the desert, with Messi Fishaye from the Hotline translating from Tigrinya, giving words to an unbearable horror that must not be ignored. I broke down that day. Messi, who had heard so many more horror stories, kept working, kept taking care of these women and men, kept giving them a voice. I remember Sigal Rozen saying goodbye, in tears, to Nana Holdbrooke, one of the leaders of the African community in the 1990s and a beloved friend, when he was deported from Israel after 20 years of living here.

We cried together that day. I hope this experience allows me to write a few personal words to Sigal Rozen, the woman who has walked this path for twenty years, without stopping for a moment. If I feel that the organization is to some extent my child, then this means that we are a family. And in familial relations there is everything, good and bad, closeness and distance, anger and love. After all these years I can say that for me, you are more than a sister in this struggle – you are its compass. You are its guiding star, at a time when it is so hard to navigate between good and evil, truth and lies, humanity and what merely assumes its outward appearance.

I hope that the Hotline, and the rest of the organizations along its arduous and maybe eternal journey, will serve as the compass for all of us. We will need it in the challenging days that are yet to come.

Einat Fishbain is a journalist who has covered social issues for the past 30 years and the founder of the online magazine "The Hottest Place in Hell."



Oscar Olivier, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and a volunteer and activist at the Hotline, at a protest against detention and deportation of migrant children, alongside his daughter Ester, who received legal status in Israel due to a government decision in 2010. Photo by Oren ziv, Activestills.

Protest in south Tel-Aviv against the deportation of refugees to third countries, February 24th, 2018. Photo by Yair Meyuhas. (pages 21-22)





The Conscience of a Country

Shahar Ilan

It is precisely because the government and public opinion are so hostile to asylum seekers that the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants is an inseparable part of the conscience of the country. Without it, I doubt the government would have limited its abuses toward foreigners in any way.

How many thousands of upright Israeli citizens owe their "Israeliness" to the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants? As far as the Israeli government is concerned, and in contrast with the policies of most Western countries, there should be no path to citizenship for a foreign worker. But when the State began bringing tens of thousands of foreign workers in the 1990s, they sometimes entered relationships and had children. These children were no less Israeli than their classmates. They had no knowledge of their parents' countries of origin, and sometimes not even their languages. But at the beginning of the last decade, the State of Israel did everything in its power to expel them to countries with which they had but a tenuous connection.

The public advocacy campaign led by the Hotline (at the time known as the Hotline for Migrant Workers) led to two nationalization decisions that applied to about 4,000 migrant workers and their children. No harm befell the Jewish character of the State. There was no wave of inter-religious marriages, of which we were warned. But thousands were granted the right to live in a country that became their home, to benefit it and to contribute to its diversity.

During its 20 years of existence, the Hotline has experienced several incarnations. At first, it fought against the trafficking of women, one of the most shameful phenomena in Israel's history, and successfully brought about a drastic reduction in the number of its victims. Then it tackled the exploitation and employment of migrant workers in conditions amounting to modern-day slavery. The Hotline published an important report documenting violence by immigration officers against migrant workers. It also filed a petition to the High Court of Justice, along with other organizations, against the Binding Law of migrant workers, leading to the ruling determining that this law creates "**modern-day slavery**." In its current incarnation, the Hotline works to ensure that asylum seekers are treated as refugees and not infiltrators, through legal activism and public advocacy. The

Hotline is an indispensable and inseparable part of Israel's conscience. Given the State's abysmal treatment of foreigners, can you imagine what the situation would have been were it not for the Hotline?

The most marginalized groups in any modern society are refugees and migrants. Each of their basic rights is challenged, and achieved only after a struggle. In Israel, their situation is particularly difficult because the country is unwilling to absorb any refugees and migrants who are not Jewish. This stems from Israel's conception of itself as a place of refuge for Jewish immigrants, (those who ascend), or those who have converted to Judaism, and no one else.

This is why Israel avoids granting refugee status to asylum seekers and treats individuals who have fled deadly conflicts and terrible dictatorships as infiltrators or illegal work migrants.

The result is that Israel has an Aliyah (ascension) policy, but not an immigration policy. This lack of policy is reflected by the Population, Immigration, and Border Authority. The Authority operates according to the ethos that it alone is Israel's gatekeeper, protecting it from an imaginary influx of gentiles; and its job is to place all possible obstacles in the path of every non-Jew who may want to remain in Israel.

The challenge facing the Hotline is so much greater due to Israelis' profound hostility toward foreigners. There is something deeply tragic about the way Israel and many of its citizens treat asylum seekers, as though the Jewish state did not properly learn the lessons of history, of how Western countries treated Jewish Holocaust refugees. Instead of adopting a policy contrary to what had been done to the Jews, the State decided to apply the exact same policies. The logic of this policy appears to be: **"We came to this land so we can treat marginalized and persecuted gentiles the same way gentiles treated us when we were marginalized and persecuted."**

The children of migrant workers were an extraordinary case that won partial public support because they were so Israeli, and were presented in the media as such. It might also stem from the fact that most of their parents arrived from the Philippines and were not black.

But my experience of writing about immigration shows that no matter how touching the story of the non-Israeli is, no matter how much he is abused, the typical person responding to the article will demand the immediate deportation

of the foreigner from Israel. This means that the Hotline operated, and continues to operate, in a very inhospitable environment. This, naturally, makes its work that much more important.

The challenges facing the Hotline are growing. The government has turned incitement against asylum seekers into one of its main rallying cries. The fact that asylum seekers are concentrated in the neglected neighborhoods of South Tel Aviv due to failed government policies interests very few people.

A major tool in the Hotline's arsenal, petitions to the court, is becoming increasingly less effective. There is now a real concern that the authority of courts will be significantly curtailed and that the High Court will no longer be able to abrogate laws, allowing the State to once again send asylum seekers to internment camps. The founder of the Hotline, Sigal Rozen, once told me that her favorite hobby is releasing people from prison. One can only hope that in the coming years, the number of asylum seekers she must rescue from prison will not significantly increase.

Shahar Ilan is a reporter and social affair analyst at the newspaper Calcalist. He also covered issues at the heart of the Hotline's work during his many years at the newspaper Haaretz.



A holocaust survivor demonstrates against the deportation of the refugees.
Photo by Yair Meyuhas.

Volunteering for the Hotline

Adv. Menachem Freedman

I first encountered the Hotline while I was a soldier, guarding the Kerem Shalom border between Israel, Egypt, and Gaza in 2006. I had been on leave for Passover and when I returned from that holiday, when we remember the Jewish refugees who crossed the Sinai Desert fleeing Pharaoh, I found new refugees at our army base who had just taken the same route. My commanders had no idea who these people were, what they had been through, or what to do with them. I was referred to Sigal Rozen at the Hotline who provided what guidance she could.

Looking back, this was a time before anyone understood how the arrival of refugees from Africa would loom so large over the Israeli consciousness, and what serious questions their arrival would pose to a country that sees itself as Jewish, democratic, and founded in the shadow of the Holocaust.

A few years later, after I began university in Canada, I found myself thinking about these questions. The Hotline had answers, and a clear vision of Israel's obligations towards refugees, and I ended up volunteering there for four years during my summer breaks. My work at the Hotline was mainly in three areas: the detention centers, the courts, and the Hotline office itself.

Traveling to assist migrants and refugees in detention was like entering an Etgar Keret story. It felt like these facilities were at the edge of the earth, and the people we were trying to help often seemed to be teetering, about to fall. Everything about these spaces was arbitrary and ad hoc: the decisions about which volunteers would be allowed to enter that day, the rulings on who would remain in detention and who would go free. The faces of the detainees, guards, and ministry officials in these prisons were as blank and windswept as the deserts where they were located. The Hotline would try to pull people out of these distant orbits, and it is some of the most challenging, desolate, and important work they do.

Working with the Hotline's legal team, I was privileged to help some of Israel's brightest legal minds as they weaved together international law, quotes from Hannah Arendt, and the compelling stories of their clients into arguments that would advance Israel's embryonic refugee law, little by little, precedent by precedent. This work inspired me to study law and become a human rights lawyer.

Finally, there is the Hotline itself, tucked away in an alley off Yehuda Halevy Street. Up three sweaty flights of stairs, you always find people waiting, on the couches, near the bathrooms, in the hallway.

They're all clutching pieces of paper in plastic sleeves. One by one, a patient volunteer helps them decode those papers, as if the papers are a map of the bureaucratic and political labyrinth that is Israel's immigration regime. The Hotline isn't always able to fix the problems that arrive in their office, but I think many of the people who come in feel a little less lost and a little more understood by the time they leave. They might not know their way out of the labyrinth, but at least they know there are others who will walk with them on their journey.

The Hotline is the most human place I ever worked, and it is a privilege to be part of it.

Adv. Menahem Freedman volunteered at the HRM from 2010 to 2014. He is a workers' rights attorney in Vancouver, Canada.



HRM staff members helping refugees detained in Holot, December 2015. Photo by Anat Vaknin Appelbaum.

Escaping from Eritrea and Working for the HRM

Ghebrehiwet Meles

My name is Ghebrehiwet Meles Tekle. I am an Eritrean asylum seeker living in Israel because I was forced to flee my beloved country in 2006, after being enslaved by my government. In 2001, while at Asmara University, I participated in peaceful protests that opposed the government's imposition of a compulsory summer work program. This led to my arbitrary arrest and imprisonment in the most remote area of Eritrea. We demonstrators were rounded up like cattle and abandoned in the desert without food, water, and shelter for many days. During that time, two students lost their lives and many others suffered dehydration. This caused a global uproar and because of pressure from the international community, we were eventually released and allowed to return to university.

However, since we had been involved in activities that directly opposed the government, we were seen as a threat to the regime and the government was keen for revenge. As a consequence, after I completed my studies in 2002, I received orders from the government to report to the Sawa Military Training Camp. The government made an example of me by subjecting me to harsh punishment to scare and dissuade the next generation of Eritrean youth from opposing the regime.

After eight months in Sawa, I was sent to the construction branch of the army for an indefinite period of time, where I worked for free and was forced to endure hard, physical labor. I felt degraded, mentally and morally. I felt like a slave, stripped of my rights, freedom, and dignity by being forced to serve the personal interests of my commanders and government officials. As a result, I lost all sense of hope in my country.

As a consequence, I decided to leave, escaping across the border to Ethiopia, where I resided until 2007. But because relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea were volatile, I decided to leave Ethiopia to seek more safety and security. In 2007, I passed through the Sinai Desert and entered Israel where I was captured by

the Israeli army upon my arrival. Because we arrived on Saturday and the IPS offices were closed, we were sent to the city of Be'er Sheva and then to Tel Aviv. Here, I sought refuge at 75 Matalon Street, a shelter that housed refugees and asylum seekers who had fled political persecution. Life in the shelter was not easy. It was overcrowded, lacked basic necessities such as beds and showers, and had poor sanitary conditions.

One of the things that struck me the most during my time in shelter was that the Israeli citizens who delivered the food and clothes parcels kept referring to Eritreans as Darfurians. On one hand I was happy that they were aware of the Darfurian plight; on the other, I was upset that there was no awareness of the situation in Eritrea. As a consequence, I asked the people in the shelter why the Israelis referred to us as Darfurians. They told me that whenever journalists had come to interview people from the shelter, the Eritreans had run away. Therefore, the Israelis were not aware of the situation in Eritrea.

After this I started to talk with my people about the need to assist the Eritrean community. We established the first leadership for the Eritrean asylum seekers in Israel, and began to create awareness about our situation among the Israeli public through the media. Early in 2007 I was interviewed on Israeli TV about Eritrea.

In addition, we built a good rapport with the human rights organizations in Israel including UNHCR. With their help we connected with members of the Israeli Parliament and the Tel Aviv Municipality. I witnessed the positive impact this had on my community in Israel, such as when, in December 2007, the Israeli government gave 2,000 B1 visas to all Eritreans who came before December 25th. I was very much excited by this news and I felt proud for having contributed a small part to the wellbeing of my friends.

At the end of 2008, I resigned from the leadership but continued to act on behalf of my community. My proudest moment was when I was employed by the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants as a translator and cultural mediator for my community, a symbol of the Hotline's trust. This gave me the opportunity to act as a bridge between my people and the Hotline, allowing me to be the voice of my people, both in the office and in prisons.

I am honored to be a staff member of this amazing organization. In my seven years of work I have seen the success of this organization in minimizing the number of detainees in Saharonim prison, in closing the Holot detention facility, cancelling

the deportation of Eritreans and Sudanese to Rwanda and Uganda, and cancelling the deportation of the Congolese community back to Congo.

I strongly believe that one day the Hotline will convince the Israeli government to acknowledge the fact that most Eritreans are genuine refugees and I wait for that day almost as much as I wait for my beloved country to become a democracy.

Ghebrehiwet (Ghere) Meles Tekle fled his homeland of Eritrea and arrived in Israel in 2007. He has been a Hotline staff member since 2012. Since 2018 he has headed the HRM's RSD Clinic.



Protest in front of the Eritrean embassy in Israel, 2012. Photo by Oren Ziv, Activestills

Holot Detention Center, 2014. Photo by Oren Ziv, Activestills. (pages 31-32)





Rights of Migrant Workers

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families came into force in 2003 to safeguard the rights of hundreds of millions of migrant workers worldwide. However, there are only 51 state parties to the convention, all of which export workers. The State of Israel, as well as other Western countries that take in migrants, are not signatories to the Convention.

Migrant workers in Israel are subject to the 1952 Entry into Israel Law, which regulates status, as well as the 1991 Foreign Workers Law, which regulates basic rights such as housing, health insurance, and employment contracts. Migrant workers' status in Israel is temporary and does not include a path to citizenship. Authorized companies apply to the Ministry of the Interior on behalf of employees they wish to recruit, after which the workers receive visas from Israeli representatives in their countries. Israel allocates quotas to specific labor sectors, without giving migrant workers the ability to move between sectors. Employees can sometimes, change employers in the same sector.

The attitude of the Israeli government towards migrant workers changes constantly, subject to pressure from stakeholders, so the quotas change frequently. Since 1990, the State of Israel has allocated quotas for migrant workers in construction and agriculture, after Palestinian workers were ejected from these sectors during the Intifada. At the same time, there has been a steep increase in the number of elderly and disabled people permitted to employ migrant caregivers. The State of Israel initiates the employment of over 100,000 migrant workers per year on average, ensuring low-cost labor in jobs that Israelis refuse to do. At the same time, the State works to deter migrants from taking jobs that are not allowed under the law, but whose wages are significantly higher. Migrant workers in Israel after their period of employment or are caught working in an unauthorized job are imprisoned and deported.

Migrant workers in Israel are employed under harsh conditions, which sometimes do not meet legal requirements. However, over the years, there have been positive changes that can be attributed in large part to the HRM: the repeal of the binding arrangement policy by the High Court of Justice; improvement of the terms of employment of construction workers; the signing of bilateral agreements with the countries of origin, which has reduced the phenomenon of high brokerage fees; and reducing the pre-deportation incarceration period and improving the conditions of imprisonment of migrants awaiting deportation. Today, over 100,000 migrant workers are employed in Israel: 56,000 care-givers, 23,000 in the agriculture sector, 15,000 in the construction industry and 6,000 specialist workers.

No Longer Out of Sight

Adv. Reut Michaeli

Few organizations around the world are able to assist migrants within detention centers, and the Hotline can take pride in being one of them. From its beginnings, the Israel Prison Service (IPS) allowed the Hotline's volunteers to enter detention facilities, meet the detainees and offer them assistance. Because Israel's default immigration policy is detention and deportation, helping those held in immigration detention facilities has exceeded the boundaries of humanitarian assistance, and become a tool that enables the fight for the liberty of detainees and brings about changes in Israel's policy.

Detained migrants have limited access to legal services, due to a lack of financial means as well as language and cultural barriers. Considering that the administrative process of detention and deportation of migrants, and the judicial oversight performed by the Detention Review Tribunals, are semi-criminal proceedings, there is great importance in ensuring representation of the detainees by a person who can mediate for them, explain the situation and their rights, and serve as their advocate. The volunteers of the Hotline do exactly this.

A volunteer appears before the Detention Review Tribunal¹ and meets the detainees to study the facts of their case. The volunteer studies what had happened to the migrants on the way to Israel, gathers information proving their nationality, and examines whether they would face persecution in their homeland, and whether their story meets the definition of modern-day slavery or human trafficking under Israeli law. The volunteer explains to the detainees the legal situation and what they should expect to encounter. They share with the detainees how they will present the argument on their behalf. This assistance reduces, albeit only partially, the infringement upon the liberty and right to a fair procedure for the migrants.

In 2001, the Entry to Israel Law was amended to include a provision explicitly stating that detained migrants could be represented at the Detention Review Tribunal by individuals who are not attorneys. The amendment was passed in light of the Hotline's work in prisons and the Knesset, and this reasoning was stated

1. An administration tribunal charged with performing judicial oversight over the detention of migrants until their deportation (see article 13(20) to the Entry to Israel Law – 1952).

explicitly in the preamble to the amended law. This is a special and unusual arrangement in Israeli law, which ordinarily only permits representation by attorneys, and is therefore a major accomplishment. The codification into law of representation by those who are not attorneys is important not only because it provides legal authorization for the Hotline's work, but also because it prohibits the IPS from trying to prevent it. In recent years, the IPS attempted, several times, to bar Hotline representatives from entering prisons in an effort to prevent us from exposing what happens inside detention facilities, particularly when the Hotline wishes to investigate and address issues concerning the detention conditions of migrants and asylum seekers.

Detention facilities are the start and end points of the process: people enter them upon arrival in Israel and are placed there just before being deported. The ability to visit detention facilities and meet those held in them enables the Hotline not only to assist people, but also expose new phenomena concerning immigration in Israel. Thus, the Hotline was specifically mentioned in the Anti-Infiltration Law with regards to the Detention Review Tribunal of "infiltrators" (as stated in the law).

Volunteers were able, though their visits to the women held in prisons, to map out the systems of trafficking of women into Israel and gather unflattering findings regarding the conduct of the State in regards to this matter, to shed light on the detention of migrants bound to their employers, and expose cases of brutality during arrests by Immigration Authority inspectors.

Meanwhile, meeting those who had just arrived in Israel in Saharonim Prison enabled the Hotline to identify the first women who survived the newly established torture camps in Sinai, to encounter those who were arrested immediately upon arrival in Israel for failing to obtain a work visa despite paying recruitment fees (the so-called "flying visa"), and meet unaccompanied minors upon their arrival.

The information provided by detainees in the various holding facilities to the Hotline is one of a kind. It is not gathered and published by anyone else. Therefore, it was only natural to collect the data and stories, and carry out, as the Hotline has done in recent years, ongoing monitoring of detention conditions and identification of new trends in prisons. The Hotline's annual monitoring reports that deal with the detention of migrants and refugees in Israel have allowed us to identify new phenomena which otherwise would have gone unnoticed, as well as the hundreds of individual cases documented by the Hotline. A warden in

Saharonim Prison once told me that these reports are a "work plan," as far as he is concerned. Indeed, many of shortcomings were addressed following publication of reports and appeals by the Hotline. The reports and other publications that relied on information collected in the prisons were cited in different instances, as well as in the Appeals Tribunal and Israeli courts. This is another way we are able to shed light on the issue of detained migrants and asylum seekers.

Adv. Reut Michaeli was the Executive Director of the HRM from 2010 to 2018. She is a private attorney who specializes in human rights, administrative law and immigration.



Photo by Activestills.

Photo courtesy of the Israel Prison Service. (pages 37-38)



בתי הסוהר
סוהר גיבעון

אין מעבר
להולכי רגל



שירות
בית ס



Who Did you Call a Slave?

Thoughts on Slavery, Binding Arrangement and Basic Fairness

Prof. Galia Sabar

One black body, chained to another black body, chained to another black body. A long chain of human vertebra, bowed and bent, faceless, helpless, devoid of human dignity, a long and aching chain. This is the image of slavery that has been fixed in our minds.

Work machines bound and led by their masters, with no chance of escape, unable to be a human being. In a planned and efficient process, black people from Africa were stripped of their humanity, rights, and most of all their liberties and became goods. Human goods. The fight to abolish the slave trade and slavery was a first and necessary step in restoring liberty, respect and value to black people. To all people.

So no, the workers brought to Israel beginning in the 1990s were not brought in as slaves, were not deprived of all their rights, were not bound in chains. Certainly not. But were rigid but camouflaged restrictive chains created? Have they been treated as free human beings? As a privileged workforce? The answer is complex. With the opening of the Israeli labor market to migrant workers, many feared that they would settle in Israel and demand status and recognition. Another concern was that their willingness to work at for low wages would push down wages in the local labor force, thus exacerbating economic inequality. For these reasons, the State established restrictive employment arrangements for hiring workers - initially called foreign workers - compared to other countries worldwide.

The arrangements included, among other things, a restriction on the period of stay, a prohibition on bringing family members, and a prohibition on employment outside the specified sector. Above all, the arrangements stipulated that the employee would only be allowed to work for the particular employer who received the permit for the worker's employment.

In this way, the employee is effectively bound to his employer. Leaving the licensed employer, for whatever reason, is cause for visa revocation. The employee, if caught, is likely to be jailed and deported back to the country of origin. This arrangement is unique among Western countries and has increased employee dependence upon employers, including those who are violent, abusive, and exploitative. Thus, by law and practice, the employee became the property of his employer.

Based on evidence gathered by Hotline volunteers and others during hundreds of visits to prisons, a harsh picture of exploitation, denial of rights, lack of effective enforcement mechanisms for workers' rights, and in particular a lack of mobility of employees between employers and occupations has emerged.

In 2002, human rights organizations petitioned the Israeli High Court of Justice (HCJ), demanding the abolition of the "Binding Arrangement" on the grounds that it was an unreasonable means of control and oversight that severely violated the human rights of foreign workers - their dignity, liberty, and rights under labor law. They argued that the "Binding Arrangement" turned employees into the property of their employers, and undermined their right to freedom of occupation in the most basic meaning of the concept.

In March 2006, after years of deliberation, review committees and newly proposed arrangements, the HCJ annulled the "binding arrangement." Justices Edmund Levy and Mishael Cheshin strongly criticized the policy, stating that the arrangement violates the fundamental human rights of foreign workers, Israeli law and international covenants. The judges went on and argued - explicitly and exceptionally - that the "Binding Arrangement" created a kind of "modern-day slavery" that violated the basic rights of workers and therefore had to be annulled.

Despite the ruling and the harsh criticism voiced by the judges, the State disregarded the ruling for two full years. Since then, various arrangements have been formulated that partially regulate the issue of mobility between employers and occupations.

The administrative shackles were removed, the legal chains were taken away, but the big questions remained: Do the State and employers treat foreign workers as human beings with rights and obligations, with dreams and aspirations and absolute freedoms? The answer is still complex.

Prof. Galia Sabar is the President of the Ruppin Academic Center and Professor in the Department of History of the Middle East and Africa. From 2004 to 2012, Prof. Sabar was a member of the Board of Directors of the HRM.



The Struggle to Improve Employment Conditions in the Construction Sector

Sigal Rozen

During my twenty years of activism at the Hotline, I have encountered countless migrants who were forced to work in sub-human conditions in various sectors of Israel's labor market. I even had the privilege to rescue some of them from their employers.

Out of all the issues we tackled at the Hotline, I chose to write about the laborers of Yilmazlar, a Turkish construction company, despite the fact that none of the company's employees have yet been recognized by the Israeli Police as victims of modern-day slavery. I chose to describe our work over the past twenty years to improve employment conditions in the company because it is an example of a prolonged, dogged struggle. Although this struggle has born very little fruit to date, this does not discourage us from continuing to pursue it.

Because I learned Turkish, since 1999, dozens of Turkish employees of the Yilmazlar company have reached out to me and asked for help receiving backpay from the company or obtaining a visa that would allow them to work in Israel for other employers. Over the years, the Hotline and Kav LaOved, our partner in this effort, have heard dozens of testimonies from employees of this company. These testimonies sound almost identical to the words of A.T., one such employee, which were summarized by Tribunal Adjudicator Elad Azar thus:

"The appellant and two other workers of the employer [Yilmazlar], who were arrested with him, all gave an identical version of events in their testimony to the Israeli Police. According to them, they were employed for 12 hours daily (excluding breaks and travel) on construction sites, some of them on night shifts. When they slept at the housing site, they were locked in their rooms. Representatives of the employer made it clear to them that they will be punished if they leave their workplace. An affidavit of Mr. Olcay, a former employee of Yilmazlar, was submitted [to the court]. In this affidavit, he described in detail

Photo by Activestills. (page 41)

the existence of a team "catching deserters" operating on behalf of Yilmazlar tasked with locating and punishing its workers who left their job and remained in Israel... The core of the claims made by the appellant are credible, in my view, and even the respondent [Yilmazlar] did not directly dispute their veracity."

Despite our complaints against the company, in 2004, the Israeli government chose Yilmazlar to carry out an "offset" agreement between Turkey and Israel to renovate tanks. As part of the agreement, Israel granted hundreds of work permits to construction workers employed by Yilmazlar whose salaries were paid in Turkey.

We quickly filed a petition against the agreement. But three years later, the justices of the High Court of Justice rejected the petition and ruled that it would not be appropriate to void the agreement, since it was limited in duration, and due to the State's claim that the workers do not pay recruitment fees. The State further claimed that it is monitoring the employment conditions at the company.

In the decade that has passed since, the number of employees has grown to 1,200 and the temporary arrangement has become permanent. Workers indeed do not pay recruitment fees, but they are obligated to sign promissory notes, which they are at times forced to pay out, with sums reaching tens of thousands of dollars.

In addition to proceedings concerning payment of backpay and obtaining legal status, we also tried to assist those workers whose testimonies indicated that they may have been subjected to employment conditions fitting the legal definition of modern-day slavery. Thus, for example, an attorney at the Legal Aid Department at the Ministry of Justice recommended recognizing one of Yilmazlar's employees, who was detained after escaping the company, as a victim of modern-day slavery:

"His description indicates that he was placed by the Yilmazlar company in a situation in which his liberty was effectively restricted – he was monitored and surveilled, he was threatened with violence if he escapes, and he was forced to work for long hours performing highly dangerous tasks..."

This worker and many others were deported back to Turkey after growing exasperated with the prolonged period of detention in Israel. The State of Israel does everything in its power to ensure that these workers do not realize their rights, as it made clear to the court in two different proceedings, in 2017 and 2019:

"Offering [this] option to Yilmazlar employees, who took the law into their own hands and left to work for a private employer of their own choosing, will create a

broad and dangerous opening, and will encourage other Yilmazlar employees to take the law into their own hands."

It is incredibly frustrating listening to testimonies about harsh working conditions for many years, all the while the victims are detained and deported before we are able to help them. I find comfort in knowing that our complaints to the authorities, the legal proceedings against the company and the regulations that the State issued in response to them, have led the company to improve its conduct: the salaries of workers rose. In recent years, workers are allowed to have a cellphone with them, even if only after work hours. The employees are allowed to leave the company's housing on weekend. This significant improvement in their employment conditions would probably have not occurred if it were not for our efforts.

An additional source of comfort for me is the group of workers we are currently representing. Despite the immense challenges they face by remaining in Israel, under threat from the company's henchmen and without visas for more than a year, the workers appear determined to pursue the ongoing legal proceedings until the realization of their rights.

The State continues to appeal against the decisions of the Appeals Tribunal to grant them work visas, but they are not giving up. This determination is what helps me continue in my efforts, and believe that soon our goal will be achieved: either Yilmazlar begins abiding by Israel's labor laws, or the company stops being allowed to operate in Israel.

Sigal Rozen is one of the founders of the HRM and was its first Executive Director. She is the Director of the Public Policy Department at the HRM.



Foreign construction workers in Israel. Photo by Afwerki Teame.

משרד המשפטים



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Preventing the Deportation of 101 Migrant Chinese Construction Workers

Adv. Yishai Shneydor

How easy it is to not see injustice, suffering and governmental indifference that harms "the other," the "foreigner," that takes place on a plane of existence separate from our own, privileged plane.

In 2002, as a lawyer at the law firm of Ben Ari, Fisch and Associates, I took on a pro-bono case: the case of the Chinese workers. I remember well the first case meeting where volunteers from the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, as well as the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, another partner in the case, presented the data and testimonies collected by Hotline volunteers from the workers detained in Ma'asiyahu Prison, as well as the transcripts and reports. They laid out all of the information, which I had undoubtedly seen in the newspaper before, but like many Israelis, chose not to read.

We delved into the heart of an entire industry of exploitation of Chinese workers, born of a combination of human cruelty and unscrupulous government regulation, applied with incomprehensible indifference. This industry revolved around "recruitment fees" paid in China by workers who wished to obtain a work permit in Israel. The promise to receive a minimum wage in Israel, significantly higher than wages in China, led workers to pay "brokers" exorbitant amounts, incomprehensible in Chinese terms, exceeding \$10,000. To pay this sum, workers would go deep into debt, taking out loans from relatives and criminals.

But in Israel, oftentimes, no one needed them. This was a program to import workers that no one intended to employ. This entire industry was based, not on the labor of the worker in Israel, but on the exorbitant recruitment fees he paid; employers, in exchange for a share of the spoils, agreed to ask for permits to employ foreign workers, even when they did not need them; recruitment companies arranged the scheme in exchange for a major share of the cut. The thousands of dollars paid by the poor Chinese financed this evil conspiracy, and when the Chinese arrived in Israel, there was no work for them.

Some of our appellants were tossed onto the side of the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway a few minutes after their pick-up van left the gates of Ben Gurion Airport. Others were traded into a secondary market of employers who could not legally obtain work visas for foreigners (contractors, farmers). The Binding Arrangement ensured that any migrant worker who escaped his employer or was employed by another person would lose his legal status.³ Naturally, this binding led to the egregious exploitation of the Chinese workers, at times even meeting the legal definition of modern-day slavery.

Israel detained and deported thousands of Chinese workers who were brought to Israel on false pretenses, lost their legal status², were exploited by employers on the black market, and lacked any knowledge of how to deal with the situation into which they had been thrown. They were deep in debt, unable to repay the huge sums they borrowed, in a way that often endangered their lives and the lives of their family members who remained in China and were the guarantors of the loans. Several dozens of these Chinese workers, thanks to the work of the Hotline's volunteers in Ma'asiyahu Prison, gathered the courage to ask for a solution from the court. A petition was filed on their behalf, and on behalf of the Hotline and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel.

I have always believed that in a petition of this kind, the story, which is sometimes referred to as (in an unsatisfyingly dry phrase) "the factual background," is more important than the legal argument. It is not mere "background;" it is the heart of the matter. The judge knows the law. I have no advantage over the judge in this field. But the story is needed to convince the judge to address the petition and provide the required solution.

The challenge was to connect the different components of this exploitative system, the regulations in place that in essence created the injustice, and also to bring forth the voices of the victims themselves, transforming them from "the other" and "the foreigner," into human beings. Human beings like you and me, hard-working people who acted in good faith, who arrived in Israel legally to try and create a better future for themselves in China.

Justice Musya Arad, who ruled on the case, decided to acknowledge the injustice. She ruled that "the facts detailed in the petition paint a grim picture about the inhumane conditions in which Chinese workers find themselves in Israel."

2. For more on the Binding Arrangement: <https://hotline.org.il/en/migrants-en/binding-arrangement/>

She ruled that the State"... must make the utmost effort to decrease to the greatest extent possible the harm to foreign workers already here. Their situation, expectations and dignity as human beings need to be taken into account." The ruling concludes with a clear order: "The petitioners will be summarily released from detention, the removal orders issued to them will be voided, and an effort will be made to find them work with employers who hold proper employment permits." The brief and searing verdict issued by Justice Musya Arad epitomizes the refusal to accept shameful government practices and an intervention on behalf of the weak and marginalized.

The intensive efforts by the Hotline for the detained Chinese workers, and dedication of the activists saved not only these 101 Chinese workers and a smidgeon of Israel's dignity, but also contributed to the changing of regulations, and eventually, to the abrogation of the Binding Arrangement, the source of this evil.

Adv. Yishai Shneydor represented the HRM in the administrative appeal 420\02 Deng Lin et al. vs. the State of Israel. As a private attorney, he sometimes represents NGOs.



Chinese migrants. Photo by Ilan Spira.

Chinese migrants detained in Ma'asiyahu prison, 2002. Photo by Nir Kafri. (pages 49-50)





Combating Human Trafficking

The UN Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000) defines the trafficking in human beings as follow: "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs." The human trafficking offense in Israeli law is narrower. Israeli law prohibits trafficking and intercession for trafficking purposes, including for the purpose of bringing a person into a state of slavery, forced labor or prostitution, or for the purpose of committing a sexual offense against that person. Section 377A of the Penal Code, 1977, defines human trafficking as "selling or buying a person, or conducting a transaction in a person, with or without barter."

During the 1990s, trafficking in women for the purpose of prostitution became prevalent in Israel. In 2000, following reports by the Israel Women's Network and Amnesty International, which relied on information provided by the HRM, the Knesset criminalized trafficking in women for the sex trade. In 2006, the law was amended to include trafficking in persons for the purpose of labor, organ trafficking, and employment in slavery-like conditions. Working under conditions of slavery is recognized by the law under the following conditions: physical confinement, passport confiscation, many hours of work without the employee's control over his own time, and the payment of meager wages or non-payment of wages. Following the struggle of human rights organizations, today migrants identified as victims of trafficking are transferred to a shelter and granted a residence permit until legal proceedings are completed against the employer, followed by a year of rehabilitation during which they can work in any work field they choose. The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, who spearheaded the struggle, won the President's Award for Combating Human Trafficking in 2009, the first year it was awarded. However, many migrants in Israel today are still employed under conditions that amount to human trafficking or slavery, though most are not identified as such and therefore cannot exercise their rights under law.

On the Glass Half-Full: The Accomplishments of the Campaign against Trafficking in Women

Dr. Nomi Levenkorn

Human rights organizations tend to see the glass as half empty: the multiple human rights abuses that continue to occur, new injustices that crop up alongside the old familiar ones, the use of new bureaucratic mechanisms to deprive people of their rights, etc. This is precisely why birthdays of organizations are refreshing — it is when we do the opposite and look at the world through rose-tinted glasses and examine the successes of the young adult turning twenty, examine her accomplishments throughout her life, and wonder what the future holds for her.

In lectures that I deliver these days about trafficking of women, I am somewhat amused by the shocked expressions I encounter when I explain, again and again, to both civilians and policemen, that in the (not so distant) past, the State approved detention of victims of human trafficking solely for being witnesses for the prosecution. At times the State also agreed to the requests of attorneys representing the traffickers to detain the women and delay their deportation, in cases when the women served as witnesses for the defense.

Upon hearing this, audiences think I am drunk — it could not possibly be true! When I say that back in the early 2000s, when a woman managed to escape her trafficker and reach us and I had to send emails to a (somewhat selective...) list of acquaintances and colleagues, asking who could take her into their home because there were no shelters or other institutional solutions, the bewilderment turns into laughter: the audience is certain that I am joking.

But it is hard to argue with facts: until 2000, human trafficking was not even a crime under Israeli law. It was possible to buy and sell human beings, as long as no other offenses were committed in the process. And even if other

crimes occurred, enforcement was lax: many of these women were called "sex tourists," and deported to their homeland without initiating criminal proceedings against their traffickers and pimps. Even unreformed pessimists such as I have to look back and admit that some accomplishments have been made since then.

We filed a petition against the provision of legal assistance to a human trafficking victim by an attorney forced on her by the trafficker, in an attempt to bring about her release into his custody to ensure she remains his slave. As a result of this petition, it is the Ministry of Justice that today provides legal assistance to trafficking victims. We filed a petition demanding the release of a prosecution witness from prison and to allow her to receive funds from the police while she waits to testify against her trafficker.

This petition led to the promulgation of a new regulation on this matter, which later contributed to the establishment of shelters for human trafficking victims. Similarly, we helped advance legislation that grants trafficking victims stay permits in Israel to undergo rehabilitation, and their right to receive compensation without proving harm was done to them.

A petition we filed together with the Human Rights Clinic at Tel Aviv University, demanding that the State finance medical services to women waiting to provide testimony against their abusers, was also successful. On the other hand, a later petition demanding that the State assume responsibility for treating women suffering from AIDS and hepatitis failed. The Supreme Court sent these women to a painful death in their homeland from these diseases. The ruling, exemplifying irony and governmental cold-heartedness, wished "...the petitioners health and a long life."

The law to incriminate clients of sex workers, which we proposed to the Knesset together with the Clinic Combatting Trafficking in Women at the Hebrew University in 2008 underwent many changes due to political considerations. The law was eventually passed in its current version in December 2018, a version that epitomizes a statist patriarchy: de-radicalized, useless and even dangerous if improperly applied by the Israeli Police. This law in particular, and the state of sex work in Israel in general, takes us back to the starting point of this article. For it is impossible to celebrate the birthday of a human rights organization without pointing out the glass half empty, without pointing out the issues the Israeli government does not want to address.

The glass half empty: while human trafficking has been curtailed due to the many groups, both non-governmental organizations and government ministries, that joined forces to combat it, prostitution, of course, continues to flourish, along with the many hardships faced by the women: the poverty, the social gaps, the workplace and the family structure. The many groups combating prostitution and trafficking in woman have multiplied like the proverbial grains of sand on the beach, so that they now compete with each other, unnecessarily so, while failing to listen to the voices of the women they are trying to save. And the long road goes on and on...

Dr. Nomi Levenkorn was the Director of the Legal Department of the HRM from 2000 until 2008. She teaches courses on human rights, women's rights, and migrant rights in various academic institutions.



Photo by Tomer Appelbaum.

Between the Individual and the Public - Campaign Against Human Trafficking

Adi Shneydor Willinger

I worked as an attorney at the Hotline from 2006 to 2009, first as a field coordinator in the effort to counter trafficking of women for the purpose of prostitution, and later as a coordinator in the effort to counter trafficking for prostitution, modern-day slavery and forced labor.

In hindsight, I realize that the most gratifying aspect of my work was not only my ability to assist individual victims, but also to bring about a larger policy change. We worked intensively in the various Knesset committees to bring about changes in legislation that would benefit all victims of human trafficking. We conducted lectures to various groups to change perceptions and increase understanding of the grave violation of human rights that is human trafficking.

And at all times we provided victims with individual legal assistance. As a result of this work, a shelter was established for men who survived slavery and forced labor, in addition to the shelter for women who survived human trafficking for sex work. We also brought about a policy change that ensured that survivors of human trafficking would receive medical care, as well as rehabilitation and work visas.

When pushing for changes in legislation and perceptions, our main challenges were ignorance, prejudices and fear of change. When providing individual assistance to the women, the challenge lay in comprehending the pain and harm the victims had endured, as well as their sense of helplessness and frustration when describing their past, the journey to Israel and the living conditions as captives of prostitution rings, and also, unfortunately, when dealing with Israeli authorities.

In the midst of this sisyphic daily grind, despite the challenges, my frustration and the horrific stories I encountered, I could not help but see the good. I met women with incredible inner strength, sometimes quite incomprehensible given what they have endured. I found hope, a strong desire to improve their lives and

overcome the limitations of being born in a certain place, to a certain family. Women who had left children behind, who were willing to do anything to ensure their children a better life.

Women who maintained a sense of humor and joy, who managed to hold on to their dreams of becoming something else, before their future became bleak. Women whose trust had faded to almost nothing, but who still wanted to help others. They fell down, they got up, they fell down and got up once again. And there were some unable to get to their feet again.

I remember them all, though I do not know what became of any of them. But I hope and pray that those who managed to survive were somehow compensated by life for their years in captivity. I hope there is at least some comfort in their lives. I hope they remember us, remember me, fondly.

Adi Shneydor Willinger worked at the HRM an attorney from 2006 to 2009, first as a field coordinator fighting human trafficking for prostitution. She is a clinical criminologist.



Photo: Shutterstock.

From the hotline publications. (pages 57-58)

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...and countering the social legitimacy they enjoy.
for changing the way the authorities deal
report concludes with practical recommendations
...the trafficking of women has little chance of succeeding.
...public discourse and outside the reach of authorities,
As long as the client, the root of trafficking,
...in the sex industry equation that the report sets out to explore.
...out whom there would be no trafficking of women: the client.
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...ason women are trafficked, very little is known about them.
...and are the driving force of this industry

Children's Rights

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), ratified by the State of Israel in 1991, positions the child's best interests as its primary principle.

Article 3 (1) of the Convention states: *"In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."* The Israeli court also attaches great importance to this principle: *"The principal of the best interests of the child is the dominant consideration, the overriding consideration. Indeed, there will be additional considerations ... but all these will be secondary, and all shall bow to the best interest of the child."*

For decades, the State of Israel has encouraged the migration of thousands of migrant workers while denying them the right to marry and build families in Israel. In January 2019, Prof. Shlomo Mor Yosef, Director General of the Population and Immigration Authority clarified: *"They have no right to marry. In Israel, they will not have a spouse and they know it, they can have their family life in their home countries."* Since this cannot be enforced, each year children are born to migrant workers in Israel, some of whom remain in the country.

For many years, the Hotline ran a public campaign that led to two government decisions, in 2005 – 2006 and a second one in 2010, which granted legal status to nearly 4,000 children aged 6- to 13-year-olds and their families on humanitarian grounds. Since 2011, the Immigration Authority has been arresting and deporting migrants with infants and preschoolers. In the summer of 2019, the Immigration Authority also began to arrest and deport school-aged children, 6 to 13-year-olds born in Israel who were not granted status in the previous decisions. An organization of nursing workers from the Philippines called UCI – United Children of Israel is currently leading a movement to stop the deportation of some 600 school-aged children.

In addition to the children of migrant workers, approximately 9,000 children of asylum seekers live in Israel, the vast majority of whom were born in the country. Like their parents, they cannot be deported back to their homeland. Between 2009 and 2013, the State of Israel imprisoned children of asylum seekers who crossed the border from Egypt with their parents. Following legal proceedings led by the Hotline, as well as a 2013 High Court decision, refugee children are no longer imprisoned.

On the Importance of the Hotline's Connection to the Community

Dr. Alejandro Paz

I volunteered at the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants from 2004 to 2006, helping the Hotline maintain contact with migrant worker families, particularly families from Latin America whose language I speak. Over the years, a distressing realization dawned upon me: Immigration Authority inspectors were constantly trying to push the limits of what they could get away with, regardless of whether instructions to do so came from the top.

Yes, they know. Parents must not be deported. But one needs to prove that they are a mother or a father, and that there is indeed no other parent who can care for the children in the event of detention and deportation. The fear. The threats. The inspectors who keep hinting that soon enough, your turn will come, and you will be deported. You better get your affairs in order beforehand. Before you are caught with your children. Before you are caught without them.

This is how they try to break the will of people. Many left because of the threats. **"Self-deportation"** joked Luna from Colombia. **"Many people deported themselves,"** she explained, because they heard rumors, many rumors. That children will be arrested at school, or that parents will be taken, and children will be left alone with no one to take care of them. The Immigration Authority calls it **"voluntary departure."** Luna and others know it was departure due to fear. Luna refused to surrender: **"I will not deport myself."**

The inspectors know how to instill fear. When they check the documents of a person without legal status, they say a few sentences. This is how they spread rumors, fears, uncertainty. Melissa from Colombia, a mother of two, would call me after seeing the inspectors' van. **"They are always waiting for us near the bus stop,"** she complained; **"what should I do? I have to get on the bus to go to work."** Melissa began finding ways to approach the station without being seen until the bus arrived. She also took pills to help calm her nerves.

Once, they detained her, despite knowing that parents are not supposed to be detained. "The trip," the Latin American migrants called it, the trip to the offices of the Immigration Authority. She was detained for a few hours, so she lost a day of work. Stress, anxiety. She could not understand exactly what she was being told in Hebrew. They know she has two children in school and needs to be home to welcome them. They know there is an order to let parents like Melissa go.

The inspectors claimed that her children would not meet the criteria that would be set, criteria set by the Ministry of Interior, along with a committee of ministers, to decide which children could gain legal status in Israel. Is five years in Israel enough for the deportation of a child to constitute cultural exile? Or maybe ten years? These debates went on for years. **"Your children will not gain legal status. You must leave by the end of the month!"** barked the inspectors. No one knew for sure what the criteria would be, but the words of the inspectors sowed doubt; do they know something she does not? Melissa panicked. She did not know why, but per their request, she gave them her phone number. She had to go home to take care of the children, welcome them when they return from school.

Then the phone calls began. **"You need to come and give your passport number"** or **"you need to come to pick up your flight tickets."** The message was clear: no matter the orders from our superiors, we will exhaust you until you surrender. We will threaten you, detain you, and the children will return from school to an empty home, again.

We tried to answer all the calls of panicked migrant workers and make it clear: it is not true, there is no deadline at the end of the month. No one knows what the criteria will be, and in the meantime, there is an order not to deport parents. Without the Hotline and the information its representatives provided to the community, countering the rumors spread by the inspectors, Melissa too might have **"voluntarily departed"** due to fear. Many others did succumb to fear, tearing their teenage children away from everything they have ever known, transplanting them to a country where they are still struggling to adjust. Others withstood the pressure and are now permanent residents of Israel.

The successful integration of all those whose parents resisted the immense pressures is a testament to the importance of sticking to one's principles, and to our belief that **"the other"** can be a productive member of our society.

Dr. Alejandro Paz volunteered at the HRM from 2004 to 2006. He is an Associate Professor of anthropology at the University of Toronto.

The deportation of asylum seekers from South Sudan. Photo by Activestills. (page 62)





The Campaign to Prevent the Deportation of Children of Migrant Workers

Rom Levkovitch

The campaign to prevent the deportation of children of migrant workers is one of the most successful efforts led by the Hotline: successful not only because it resulted in hundreds of children and their parents obtaining legal status, but also because of how it challenged and redefined the public image of the "foreign workers." I still remember the confused look on Abraham Poraz's face, then Minister of Interior, when nine-year-old Galit, during a TV news panel, asked him: "Why do you want to deport my father?! What did he do to you?"

The year was 2003 and the Immigration Authority was at the height of its hunting season: destroying vibrant communities, particularly the west African community, whose members are especially vulnerable to arrest due to the color of their skin. This was the second time that Galit's father, an immigrant from Ghana, was arrested by the Immigration Police, and Galit was determined to fight for his release. And so, without hiding her identity, in fluent Hebrew, and with a great deal of courage, nine-year-old Galit spoke truth to power and astonished the participants of the debate and the viewers.

Many at the Hotline remember Galit's TV appearance as a turning point in the public perception of migrant workers: no more blurry shadows of invisible people mediated for public appearance by experts, but children and teenagers who direct their gaze toward the Israeli public, speaking to it in their language and ours, challenging and redefining Israeli identity.

Following reports that the Immigration Authority and Ministry of Interior were preparing to detain and deport families and children, the Hotline (in cooperation with the NGO ActiveVision) brought together a group of children of migrant workers committed to campaigning against the deportation by directly appealing to the

Deportation of South Sudan. Photo by Activestills. (page 63)

Israeli public. The children appeared in the media, participated in a photography project, wrote blogs, gave lectures. Their faces even adorned postcards. In a role-reversal characteristic of second-generation immigrants, the teenagers found themselves having to fight for their legal status, and that of their siblings and parents. In many ways, they were typical teenagers: navigating school, youth movements and social events. Some of them had Hebrew names and even hid from their friends the fact that they were undocumented.

The threat of deportation was palpable, with memories of their fathers' deportation etched in the minds of many of the children. In their appeal to the Israeli public, the children reminded us that they are typical Israelis: they speak Hebrew, are members of youth movements, listen to hip-hop music and eat shawarma. They also demanded legal status for their parents, forced to operate according to the rules of an economy that relies on the sweat and efforts of migrants, but prevents them from gaining rights.

"I see my mother working 15 hours a day, six days a week, 12 months a year, without national insurance or any support from the government," wrote 18-year-old Eduardo, at the time a student at Bialik Rogozin High School. The struggle for his future, he explained, stemmed from his desire **"to be worthy of even one drop of my mother's sweat."**

The accomplishments in the campaign for the children – and there are many such wonderful successes – aroused great joy among us, but was mixed with a sense of trepidation: the Israeli government defined the granting of legal status to the children and their families as a one-time occurrence, a humanitarian gesture, and not a right.

I remember how, in December 2005, for example, we went with the first tens of children who received legal status to a ceremony in which they received permanent residency from the Deputy Minister of Interior. It was a confusing occasion: for the first time, a government in Israel granted legal status to these children after years of struggle. At the same time, the same government approved and laid the groundwork for the beginning of detention and deportation of other children and their parents.

The arbitrary criteria set by the government divided children who gained legal status from those who were denied it and who thus became prime targets for deportation. For example, children over the age of six when the government decision was made were granted legal status, but not who were five and a half years old, who were rejected. Galit, who was born in Israel, fit the age criterion, but was rejected because her parents, who entered Israel as pilgrims, did so illegally.

The writing was on the wall: until 2009, hundreds of children who did not fit the criteria of the first decision were under constant threat of deportation, and in July 2009, the head of the Immigration Authority announced that he would now move to arrest and deport them.

The campaign that accompanied the struggle in this second round was unprecedented, carried out in cooperation with many organizations and led by the Israeli Children NGO, which came together in the offices of the Hotline. The community of migrant families led the struggle into the heart of the political consensus and managed in 2010 to pressure the government into making another one-time decision to grant legal status to hundreds of children.

This time, as a result of Galit's brave participation in the Knesset committee hearings, the criteria were changed in order to include her as well. It took five additional years until she was finally granted legal status in Israel. However, her brave appeal on TV to the Minister of Interior, when she was just nine years old, paved the way for the teenagers who followed her and changed the way we think about migrants and Israeli identity.

Rom Levkovitch was a National Service Volunteer at the HRM from 2004 to 2005, and the HRM's Spokesperson from 2005 2010. He is now a PHD student at the City University of New York (CUNY) in anthropology.



Protest against the deportation of migrant children. Photo by Yair Meyuhas.

Protest against the deportation of migrant children 2. Photo by Yair Meyuhas. (pages 67-68)





Legal Status for Children of Migrants

Evelyn Diaz Araque

I see the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants as a project. A project that saves lives, a project that changes life, but especially a project that is necessary for life. The Hotline deals with incredibly heavy subjects, but the goals are sacrosanct. My path crossed with the Hotline's tragically late, at the age of 14, merely few months after my older sister completed her studies at Bialik Rogozin High School. When she reached the age of 19, she was detained, torn from our tiny family, and deported to Colombia, a country where no one was expecting her and which she did not remember at all. Her deportation was avoidable, but that tiny delay in encountering the Hotline separated us from our rights, rights that we did not know at the time that we could realize. My sister's sudden deportation devastated our family and my mother has not recovered since, mentally or physically.

I organically and immediately joined the Hotline with the hope of helping anyone I could and trying to help even those I could not. I knew that like me, there are many others who do not know about the existence of the Hotline in time, or at all, and that the fear of persecution deprives them of their rights even further. I witnessed the campaign the Hotline ran for several years, a campaign that led to the government's decision to grant legal status to about 2,300 children of migrants and their families in 2006. Unfortunately, my sister and I had not spent enough years in Israel (one of the criteria) and therefore, we did not obtain legal status.

I worked together with the Hotline's team to advance the struggle of the children of migrant workers in an effort to prevent our deportation from the country. In 2009, after the head of the Immigration Authority announced a campaign to deport families, a new energetic organization was formed, "Israeli Children." Together with this organization we were able not only to prevent the deportation of families, but even to bring about another governmental decision to give legal status to a similar number of families, an achievement we did not believe we would ever manage to repeat. I remember many years of giving talks, interviews to various media outlets, participating in protests, giving speeches, appearing in documentaries, etc.

It's hard for me to point to a moment when the struggle begins. The struggle is a

live organism in which we teach ourselves the secrets of the rules in an effort to actualize human rights. Sometimes it's hard to comprehend how hard one needs to struggle to achieve such a basic goal. Everyone who takes part in the activities of the Hotline knows: this is not a job, and surely not a hobby, but a way of life. We chose not to remain blind, and there is no turning back.

During the long struggle to prevent the deportation and obtain legal status in which I took part, I had to also take care of my sick mother, my young brother, and carry the burden of providing for my entire family. Despite all of this, through extreme exertion, I managed to graduate from high school with high grades. Following the 2010 governmental decision, my family and I received legal status. Obtaining that status changed our lives: visiting a doctor stopped being a privilege and became a normal right. My mother could finally receive consistent medical care. The legal status in Israel allowed me to apply for academic studies abroad without worrying that I would not be able to see my family if I leave. After much hard work and a great deal of help from friends and donors, I was accepted to Clark University in the United States, where I am pursuing my Bachelor's Degree today. This year, thanks to the newly obtained legal status and for the first time since my sister was deported from Israel, I was able to help my mother and younger brother to visit her in Colombia. For the first time in over a decade, my mother met her daughter. My nine-year-old brother met his oldest sister whom he has never met.

Many things have changed for the better, but scars remain, and we will have to bear them forever. Rebuilding our mental, financial, and physical life is a daily challenge that we have taken upon ourselves.

I am proud to say "we" when I talk about the Hotline, but sometimes I take a step back and admire the amazing work that this organization is doing, work in which I have had the honor of participating. I also stop to remember that the struggle for me may be over, but for many others, migrants, refugees, and their children, it is only a matter of time until they are forced to face the next trauma. Trying to minimize the scope of the trauma is the heart of the work of the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants. I am looking forward and hoping for many more years of important work!

Evelyn Diaz Araque volunteered at the HRM from 2008 to 2016. She is an undergraduate student at Clark University, USA.

Releasing Women and Children from Saharonim Prison

Rahel Gebretsadok

Like anyone seeking peace and stability, if I had said that "I knew what was waiting for me," when I left my home in Eritrea at the age of 13, I would be lying. But I had hope. People like me and I had no idea what was awaiting us; as crazy it sounds, we decided to go for it, because home was not home anymore, and we felt we had no other choice. This applies to every single place we reached, including Saharonim Prison. When we made it to the border of Israel, we were taken straight to the prison. After they asked us some questions, we stayed there until we were suddenly released.

Now, as a grown woman, I think about the fact that, like other asylum seekers, the only Israeli official document I had besides the Israeli "conditional release permit" was my prison ID, a paper that shows I was once a prisoner, with a prison number. My mom, my two sisters, my brother and I, we were all prisoners; my youngest sister was seven at the time. I could write on and on about why this is wrong, or how children should be treated, but countries determine their own policies, regardless of what their victims think about it. Yet, as human beings, I feel we deserved an explanation back then about what they were doing to us, where we were, and why we were there.

Life in Saharonim Prison was hard, but it was safer than previous shelters we found along our journey. For instance, in our tent there were five families, together with women with no kids. Our family was 5: 4 kids, ages 13, 12, 10, and 7, plus our mom. There was one Ethiopian woman with a one-year-old, two Sudanese women, each with two children, and a single woman. Two of the Sudanese kids, around our age, were with their grandmother, who fled with them when a tribal conflict broke out and they lost their parents. The other two Sudanese kids were around two and four years old. Together, we were nine kids and five women in the tent. Each family had one bed, though the beds for families were bigger than the beds for single women.

I remember how mothers with babies used to complain about the shortage of baby food. Despite the shortages, the women shared their food, a custom that helped them survive in times of trouble.

Refugees in Saharonim Prison did not know how long they would stay there, including us. We did not know why we were there; we did not even know it was a prison. No one told us. Aside from the peace of mind because we finally felt safe, the place had its disadvantages. We were not free. It was closed. We had to follow the orders of guards. Families could not see each other, even though they were all in Saharonim Prison. Fathers were held separately from their wives and children. Children could not go to school or spend time outside the confines of Saharonim. Not knowing what would happen next and being unable to plan our future was very hard. It was scary. The longer a person is detained, the worse his situation gets. Sometimes, we kids had nothing to do all day long and we were going nuts. I now think this could lead to the development of mental and behavioral problems. But the hardest thing for me was that whenever my family or any of the other refugees were taken out of the prison, even for medical check-ups, we were handcuffed. All of us: men, women, and children.

On April 2013, thanks to a petition by the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants on behalf of an Eritrean mother and her 11- and 8-year-old daughters, families like mine are no longer detained for unknown and unlimited periods of time. It is an important and a wonderful achievement, which prevents the detention of innocent people, and especially children, in prison without trial and without time limits. It is an achievement that helps prevent the disastrous effects of long-term imprisonment among people who have already suffered so much, and for that I would like to thank the Hotline.

Rahel Gebretsadok is a daughter of Pentecostal Eritrean asylum seekers. She arrived in Israel at the age of 13. These days she is a student of international relations, human rights and African studies at FIU. Rahel is a runner and Israel's champion in the 1,500 meter race.

Women's March for Freedom, 15.1.14. Photo by Keren Manor, Activestills. (pages 73-74)

Merci in Givon Prison. Photo by Avshalom Shoshani, courtesy of Maariv. (page 75)





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Promoting the Rights of Unaccompanied Children

Adv. Oded Feller

What does one do when encountering an African teenager, alone, hiding in a staircase? Do we call social services or the Immigration Authority? What are the relevant legal provisions – the ones dealing with children or with undocumented migrants? We posed these questions to Israel courts, time and time again.

As far as the State of Israel is concerned, there was no dilemma. When deciding between viewing the teenager as a minor, entitled to the protection of welfare services, or as the Immigration Authority views her, the State chose the latter. The proper place for undocumented minors residing in Israel on their own is in prison, argued the State, and they should be deported.

In 2004, the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel first turned to the District Court in Tel Aviv in an urgent petition to prevent the deportation of African minors held in detention. No one among the Israeli authorities had bothered to find out what would happen to them in the event they were deported from Israel.

In the petition we demanded that the Ministry of Welfare become involved in the process of detention and deportation of unaccompanied minors. We demanded that welfare services provide input as to the best manner to handle such children. We argued that lack of legal status does not justify the detention of a minor and demanded that the deportation of an unaccompanied minor be carried out only after careful coordination with the receiving country. According to international law, the detention of a child is always the last resort and the welfare of the child must always be paramount.

The District Court rejected the petition. We appealed to the High Court of Justice, and the hearing was held before an expanded panel of seven judges. Although the appeal concerned the matter of minors, the judges were in no rush to issue a verdict, and children continued to be detained and occasionally deported.

Despite this setback, the spirited activism of the Hotline in other legal proceedings was more successful. The regulation concerning the age assessment of undocumented minors was improved, and later, in 2007, the Haifa District Court ruled that every undocumented migrant in detention is entitled to legal representation at the expense of the State. The Legal Aid Department at the Ministry of Justice began representing the children.

In late 2008, after four years of deliberations, the appeal to the Supreme Court bore fruit as well. The State promulgated a regulation concerning the handling of unaccompanied children, which ensured the involvement of welfare services. According to the regulation, minors under the age of 12 would not be held in detention, while older unaccompanied minors would be held at a facility employing a social worker, empowered to determine whether to transfer them to a different type of facility. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs could carry out the coordination with the country of destination to ensure adequate conditions upon their arrival. The Court ordered the State to implement the promulgated regulation.

The implementation of the regulation, however, encountered challenges and the children remained in detention. In 2009, we turned to the Knesset Committee on the Rights of the Child asking for its intervention. The Committee held hearings on the matter and the Chairman of the committee demanded that a solution be found for the children that would not entail detention.

In 2011, the regulation was amended, and the age of detention was increased from 12 to 14; it was also amended so that unaccompanied minors between the ages of 14 to 16 would not be held in detention longer than necessary to find the right solution for them. The Ministry of Education committed itself to taking in up to 100 unaccompanied children at any time. The Legal Aid Department filed a petition demanding the release of children who remained in detention. The petition was rejected, but the detention conditions were significantly improved.

Many children who had been held for prolonged periods, some of them for more than an entire year, were released from detention. What became of them? The outcomes were mixed: some grim, some uplifting. The youngest of the children, who were sent to boarding schools, often became children again. They gained a home, support, and education. The older children were released to the care of a relative or someone from the community.

Some of them integrated into schools, but many were forced to become adults too early and fend for themselves. They preferred freedom over prison, but because the State did not provide them with any support, they were forced to survive on their own in an exploitive labor market. Some of the children were survivors of torture and human trafficking but were not recognized as such and were not handled accordingly. Since the crossings from Egypt into Israel were halted in late 2012, the number of minors decreased as well, and for several years now, there has been no separate detention facility for unaccompanied children.

The tale of unaccompanied minors is a special chapter in the history of the Hotline, along with the development of tools it continues to use today. The presence of Hotline representatives in detention facilities allows them to identify and help migrants and asylum seekers in need. Addressing these cases has professionalized the response of the Hotline and propelled it to develop solutions. The Hotline launched a campaign to bring about systematic change to ensure the adoption and implementation of these solutions through legal activism, policy advocacy, and public activism.

The State of Israel no longer considers the child in the staircase to be a migrant. It is the Hotline that is responsible for this change.

Oded Feller was a member of the HRM's Board of Directors from 2004 to 2010 and is a current board member since 2018. He is the head of the Legal Department at the Association for Civil Rights in Israel and an attorney who specializes in human rights, immigration, and status.



Photo by Malin Fezehai.

Recognition of Asylum Seekers as Refugees

A refugee, according to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, is a person "who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

Most of the asylum seekers who fled to Israel are citizens of Sudan and Eritrea. The Sudanese have escaped dictatorship, genocide, and ethnic cleansing carried out by the Khartoum regime against non-Arab African tribes in Western Sudan (the Darfur region) and the South (the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile). The Eritreans have fled a dictatorship that has not held elections since its inception, has almost no civil justice system and which implements a compulsory 25-year military or national service which, in reality, has no time limit and involves hard labor without pay. Deserters are considered traitors and if caught are imprisoned, tortured, and sometimes executed. Despite these severe threats, thousands of Eritreans flee each month. The State of Israel's policy is to grant citizens of Sudan and Eritrea "temporary humanitarian status," in accordance with the "non-refoulement" principle, the core of the Refugee Convention, which forbids a receiving country from returning a person to a place where his life or liberty might be in danger.

In Israel, until the end of 2013, Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers who were not in detention could not submit individual asylum applications, so none were recognized as refugees. The Ministry of the Interior, responsible for examining asylum applications, explained that because Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers cannot be deported to their countries of origin, it examines individual applications only of non-Eritrean and Sudanese nationals. In other words, the Ministry's policy was to refrain from checking asylum applications of those who are eligible for refugee status. Since the end of 2013, asylum seekers from these countries have been allowed to apply individually for asylum, yet thousands have been waiting years to receive an answer. All asylum seekers are required to regularly renew their 2A5 residence permits in one of two offices nationwide, which constitutes release from detention under restrictive conditions. These permits ensure extremely limited access to health and welfare services, and do not bestow the right to work legally. As of 2019 there are approximately 23,500 asylum seekers from Eritrea and 6,000 asylum seekers from Sudan. The State of Israel has recognized 13 Eritreans and only 1 Sudanese as refugees.

Legal Status for Darfuris

Ibrahim Saadeldin

First of all I want to wish a happy 20th birthday to the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants: congratulations and lots of love!

From the first moment in March 2006, when I was detained in Tsohar Prison, my relationship with the Hotline was excellent. The first time I met our volunteers was when they came to visit us. That visit was immensely important for us; it gave us hope, like being a child who finally found his mother after the hardships we had experienced in Sudan, Egypt, and Israel.

Our positive relationship continued with regular visits of Hotline volunteers, especially in Ma'asiyahu Prison where I was detained for more than a year. Many of us detainees thought the Hotline volunteers could help us be released. Therefore, we often called them on the phone and asked WHEN we would be released... but of course they didn't know this. We were often irritated by that answer; on the other hand, the volunteers never became angry or irritated, which had a calming effect on us all. The Hotline volunteers looked for alternative custody places for us in kibbutzim and moshavim around the country, and prepared reports for the adjudicator in Ma'asiyahu to persuade him to release us there. When the adjudicator agreed, the volunteers accompanied us from the prison to the alternative custody, and also continued to monitor our situation. Thanks to their efforts, and the fact that in most places we were paid way below the minimum wage, the adjudicator agreed to release us from alternative custody in March 2007.

The Hotline was like a wide-open door to Israeli society, eyes through which we could see a new future in a foreign land. In the summer of 2007, the Hotline arranged a trip for us to the Kinneret and Golan Heights. This was a wonderful two-day vacation for 120 of us from Sudan who lived in the center and north of Israel. That trip let me meet with old friends who I hadn't seen since our release from prison, allowed us to meet more people from the Hotline, and to see the views of northern Israel.

I first arrived at the Hotline office in July 2007 to give my thanks, and also to participate in the first meeting of the Darfur in Israel Association. The doors of Hotline were always open to us. We held our community meetings there and met

with other communities. This is when we started to organize lists of participants, which became useful when the Israeli authorities succumbed to public pressure initiated by the Hotline and other NGOs and agreed to grant 500 Darfurian refugees temporary residency (A5 visas) in Israel. This enabled us to find steady employment, get medical insurance, open bank accounts, apply for higher education, get travel documents for travel abroad, and to be free to move around the country. In other words, Israeli society began to recognize us as human beings with rights.

All this could not have been achieved without the help of Hotline. I thank the Hotline and all its volunteers with all my heart and look forward to continuing our fine relationship.

Ibrahim Saadeldin was a client of the HRM from 2006 to 2010. He is the author of the autobiography *One of Millions* and the founder and Executive Director of the Euro-African Forum on Rights and Development.



Photo by Malin Fezehai.

My Struggle to Obtain Refugee Status in Israel: Between Optimism and Naïveté

Mutasim Ali

I never thought I would have to dedicate multiple years to my struggle to obtain refugee status. In my mind, my struggle was always about bringing about a civilian revoltion in Sudan, not refugee status in Israel. Unfortunately, after entering Israel in 2009, I had to fight on a daily basis for decent treatment of African asylum seekers and refugees in Israel. I do not intend to describe here all my thoughts and feelings since entering Israel, but only those connected to my struggle to obtain refugee status.

On January 19, 2014, I visited the central Tel Aviv office (Azrieli) of the Population, Immigration, and Border Authority to renew my conditional release visa. In line with me were hundreds of asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea who had all come to renew their visas. When it was my turn to enter, the Immigration Authority clerk probably recognized me due to my activism and called the manager. The manger asked me one question only: **"You know that you are going to receive a summons to the Holot Open Residency Center, and you are supposed to report [for detention] on February 25, 2014?"** I said that I did not know this, but I have no problem in reporting for detention.

On the one hand, I did not see a difference between myself and others who had been ordered to report for imprisonment in Holot. On the other, I thought a lot about leaving everything, my home, my friends, my work. How can I continue the struggle? Is it right to abide by a law that so severely infringes upon my right as a human being to liberty? And if I resist this law, will I be taking the law into my own hands? Can I do that as someone who escaped a country ruled by fear and not the rule of law? I am a law-abiding person and I do not want to live in a place where laws are not respected.

Eventually, I decided to report to detention in the facility and fight against this policy from within it along with my detained friends. I was not sure how much influence I could have from inside the facility. If outside of Holot, with my capabilities and "freedom" I could not have much of an effect on the government's policy, it seemed naïve to think that I could make a difference with my freedom significantly curtailed in a place completely lacking normal living conditions. Despite this, I was very optimistic. My optimism stemmed from a combination of legal and public support.

First, legal support of a number of actors including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and human rights organizations, chief among them the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants. The relationship with the Hotline and the Director of the Legal Department at the time, Adv. Assaf Weitsen, went beyond an attorney-client relationship, since we had become friends. We went through multiple hearings on my case, at the District Court in Tel Aviv, the Supreme Court and then the District Court in Be'er Sheva. Those were long and grueling hearings, and almost all the verdicts and decisions were disappointing, but I remained optimistic. Optimism drove me to stand in front of Justice Yossef Alon, the Chief Justice of the Beer Sheva District Court, and state:

"I stand before you full of hope because I am such a strong believer in the Israeli justice system, and this is one of the main differences from my homeland of Darfur in Sudan. When I entered Israel in 2009... I did everything asked of me to receive political asylum. In the spirit of the [upcoming] Passover holiday, the Holiday of Liberty, I expect this august court to put an end to this injustice."

The second reason I was optimistic was support from the refugee community, Israeli citizens, members of Knesset and foreign diplomats. I believe that our struggle is more than a struggle for refugee status. This is a struggle to change the negative perceptions about African asylum seekers in Israel. This public support lifted my spirit when faced with difficulties and challenges affecting me personally, and the community as a whole.

In mid-2016, the State finally acquiesced and granted me refugee status, after a drawn-out legal battle waged by the Hotline on my behalf. Despite my optimism that it is possible to promote a just policy that addresses the needs of Israeli citizens and asylum seekers, I did not believe that I personally would gain refugee status in Israel. I knew that I am a citizen of an enemy state, Sudan, and that over the years, due to my activism, officials close to decision-makers within the Ministry

of Interior have come to consider me a propagandist undermining the State of Israel. In addition, the State of Israel has officially adopted abusive policies toward African asylum seekers, "to make their lives miserable," in the words of former Minister of Interior Eli Yishai, to break our spirit.

Granting me refugee status did not serve the interests of the government. I was shocked and could not believe the news until I saw the letter from the Legal Department at the Ministry of Justice. I was so overwhelmed I could not read even one line out of the brief three-line letter. Obtaining refugee status changed my life. It allowed me to complete my Bachelor's Degree in law, work at the Immigration Clinic at Harvard University and soon begin a Master's Degree in international and comparative law at George Washington University in the United States. Without refugee status I would not have been able to travel outside of Israel.

It took six legal proceedings to force the State of Israel to grant me legal status, and till this day, I am the sole Sudanese citizen who obtained this status. All other Sudanese nationals who gained temporary residency (A5 visa), received it on humanitarian grounds, without examining their asylum case. I still hope that the State of Israel will give refuge to those desperate for it, and I thank the Hotline and other organizations which helped me realize my dream. I hope they continue in their important work for a better and more tolerant world.

Mutasim Ali is the only recognized Sudanese refugee in Israel. He was represented by the HRM from 2014 to 2016 and after his release from Holot studied law at the Ramat Gan College. Today he is a graduate student at George Washington University in Washington, DC.





The Struggle Against the Incarceration of Refugees

Article 31(1) of the International Covenant on the Status of Refugees makes it clear that illegal entry to a country by asylum seekers cannot serve as grounds for their detention under the immigration laws of the state which receives them. Article 9(1) of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibits both arbitrary and prolonged detention when there is no effective way to expel the detainees.

The State of Israel issues detention and removal orders against asylum seekers, attempting to keep them in custody until they are removed from the country. According to the Entry into Israel Law, if the expulsion cannot be carried out for more than 60 days, the detainees should be released under certain circumstances. Court rulings express the need to balance between the government's interest in deporting undocumented migrants and their right to freedom. The detainees' rights for freedom increases when detention is extended and their deportation cannot be exercised.

Since 2012, the Israeli government has repeatedly tried to change the law to allow long-term incarceration of asylum seekers and refugees. Then-Minister of Interior Eli Yishai, said in the summer of 2012: **"Until I have the opportunity to deport them, I will imprison them and make their lives miserable."** Indeed, over the last decade Israeli authorities made use of detention as a tool to make life impossible for asylum seekers and compel them to leave Israel **"voluntarily."**

The HRM has kept up an ongoing fight against these initiatives.

In 2012-2013, approximately 3,000 asylum seekers were imprisoned under the Prevention of Infiltration Law, which at that time allowed Eritrean refugees to be incarcerated for a minimum period of three years, and Sudanese refugees to be incarcerated indefinitely.

The HRM, in collaboration with fellow organizations, led a legal battle that reduced the detention period and improved the conditions of incarceration in a way that eventually led to the government's decision to close Holot Detention Center, where most detained asylum seekers were held. As of 2019, only a few dozen asylum seekers and refugees are incarcerated in Israel.

"Constitutional Dialogue"

On the Struggle Against the Anti-Infiltration Law

Adv. Yonatan Berman

"Constitutional dialogue." This is how some Supreme Court justices called the prolonged three-round saga that went on from 2012 to 2015. During those years, the Court struck down sections of the Anti-Infiltration Law, and the Knesset went back and passed new laws, the Court struck down additional sections of those law; rinse and repeat.

It takes a great degree of naiveté, disingenuousness and cynicism to call this pattern **"a constitutional dialogue."** It is akin to claiming that when a child tries to dissuade the school bully from using violence using intellectual arguments, while the bully pins him to the ground and thrashes him again and again, is a form of dialogue.

Since the influx of asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea began reaching Israel in 2006, and until the passing into law of the third amendment to the Anti-Infiltration Law in 2012, the Hotline and its partner organizations won multiple victories concerning release of asylum seekers from detention. Over the years, the Hotline and others managed to undermine the perception and State approach that Sudanese asylum seekers are to be assumed dangerous, due to their nationality, and are to be jailed or released only to certain isolated locations, such as kibbutzim.

The Hotline won a victory against conditioning the release of Eritrean asylum seekers by placing them under the supervision of exploitative employers in the agricultural field. The Hotline also challenged the desire of the State to hold asylum seekers in detention when there was clearly no avenue to deport them.

In early 2012, before the third amendment to the Anti-Infiltration Law was promulgated, the standard route asylum seekers followed included being apprehended near the border, wasting weeks or months in Saharonim Prison and then being released. Some of the Hotline's work at the time was filing release requests for asylum seekers, to shorten as much as possible the duration of their unnecessary detention.

The third amendment to the Anti-Infiltration Law changed the rules of the game. Asylum seekers could no longer expect to be released after a relatively short period. All releases were halted. The third amendment determined, among other things, that **"infiltrators"** could be held in detention for a period of three years. Only in exceptional cases were asylum seekers released, with the vast majority being kept in prolonged detention. Among the detainees were children of all ages. For example, Najet Adan, the prime appellant in the petition filed by human rights organizations against the law, was a one-year-old baby. When we first met her, she was crawling on the floor of Saharonim Prison.

In September 2013, the High Court of Justice struck down the provisions of the law that allowed for the incarceration of up to three years for asylum seekers, finding that section of the law to be unconstitutional, since it allowed the detention of individuals who are not undergoing deportation proceedings. But on the day the verdict was given, the Minister of Interior at the time, Gideon Saar, appeared on television and with a solemn face vowed to advance legislation that would undermine the High Court's ruling.

The High Court of Justice gave the Ministry of Interior 90 days from the issuance of the verdict to examine the individual case of each of the detainees (and thus, in theory, release those who could not be detained under different laws). But the Ministry of Interior dragged its feet in releasing the asylum seekers, and a moment before the 90 days elapsed, the government rushed through a law (the fourth amendment to the Anti-Infiltration Law), allowing for the incarceration for a year of newly arrived asylum seekers. In addition, all **"infiltrators,"** sans a few exceptions, could be held for unlimited durations in a detention facility labeled an **"open center."**

Following the passing of the law, the Israeli Prison Service began operating the newly inaugurated Holot facility, which held thousands of asylum seekers in open-ended detention. The individuals held at the facility could leave the facility during the day but were obligated to report for three roll calls per day. The stated goal of the facility was to pressure those held within its confines, to **"agree"** to leave Israel **"willingly"** despite the prohibition to deport them.

This law, too, was struck down by the High Court of Justice in September 2014. This time, the High Court ruled that the one-year incarceration, as well as the open-ended detention in the **"open center,"** were unconstitutional. The Court voided several additional provisions of the law.

But this time, again, the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice were determined to thwart the implementation of the ruling and passed another amendment to the law. This time, the amendment allowed for the incarceration of asylum seekers for up to three months, and detention at the "open center" for a period of 20 months. This time, again, the High Court struck down sections of the law, determining that the 20 months detention period in the "open facility" was disproportional. But when responding to the argument made by human rights organizations against the law that any detention of asylum seekers at the Holot facility was unconstitutional, the Court presented a winding and unconvincing argument.

The Court accepted the claim by the State during the legal proceeding that the purpose of the law was not to break the spirits of the detained asylum seekers to agree to leave the country, despite clear statements from Israel's political leadership and government officials, proclaiming that this is exactly the purpose of the facility. Instead, the justices accepted the contrived argument that the purpose of the facility is to "remove infiltrators from city centers." At the same time there were tens of thousands of asylum seekers residing in Israeli cities, and only a few thousand were detained at Holot.

In the "dialogue" between the judiciary, the government, and the Knesset, the latter took into account the principles set forth by the Court. Each of the three rulings was supposed to bring about a fundamental shift in the thinking of Israel's executive and legislative branches, to reconsider the policy toward asylum seekers and adopt steps that were not intended to abuse them until they succumb to the pressure and leave. Instead, time and time again, the government and the Knesset preferred to trample on the principles set by the Court with regards to the deprivation of liberty of asylum seekers. It takes two to tango, and the same applies to dialogue.

Ad. Yonatan Berman volunteered at the HRM from 2001 to 2005, worked as an attorney at the Hotline from 2005-2008, and was the head of the HRM's Legal Department from 2008 to 2012. He is an expert in public law and a partner at the Har-Zahav, Edelstien, and Berman Law Offices.

Photo by Activestills. (pages 91-92)



WE ARE
FUGEES



On the Release of 179 Eritreans and Sudanese Jailed for More Than Two Years

Adv. Assaf Weitsen

In late November 2014, 179 human beings who arrived in Israel from Sudan and Eritrea seeking asylum were released from prison. They had been held in facilities managed by the Israeli Prison Services, Saharonim Prison and Holot Detention Center, since entering Israel in the summer of 2012. They were deprived of liberty for two and a half years by the State of Israel, which jailed them to prevent their “settling in city centers” and to deter and prevent – by example of their confinement – the entry of other asylum seekers to Israel.

From the beginning, it was clear to us at the Hotline that their incarceration was an injustice. We hoped that, after the Supreme Court twice abrogated the legislation under which they were jailed and ordered their release, the Ministry of Interior and the State Attorney’s Office, or at least the courts, would finally understand. Despite this, all attempts made by the Hotline to bring about the release of this group failed repeatedly throughout those two years. Individual cases filed in the tribunals and district courts were ruled upon without setting precedents that would apply to other cases. When we reached the Supreme Court, the State would fold before a ruling was made. The justices, as they sometimes do in cases when their sense of justice does not align with the political circumstances as they understand them, would decide that the proceedings had become superfluous and refused to issue a ruling that would assist individuals in the same circumstances. Thus, the Ministry of Interior was able to continue their abuse of this group and prevent the release of its members.

Eventually, we decided to file a petition directly to the High Court of Justice, although according to Israel regulations, proceedings dealing with the release of individuals are generally adjudicated in the Appeals Tribunal and then the District Courts. We included 138 petitioners, from whom the Crisis Intervention Center at the Hotline laboriously collected power of attorney documents and demanded their immediate release. We endured several nerve-wracking days, fearing that the

petition would be rejected outright, before the Court ordered the State to respond. Suddenly, a few weeks later (though it felt like an eternity), the State Attorney's office informed the Court that all 138 petitioners would be released within days. Just like that, without a hearing or a ruling. When we received the response, we immediately dispatched a letter demanding the release of 41 additional asylum seekers who for various reasons did not give us power of attorney but were part of the same group. They too were released shortly thereafter. The petition was dismissed after the release, with the only sign it was served being the freedom granted to 179 individuals, and the mark they left on their surrounding after having been belatedly granted freedom.

Why did this proceeding succeed? Legal genius was not responsible, nor merciful judges who went out of their way to help. It seems that the only thing needed to release those individuals was a decision by several state employees that just then, exactly at that moment, there was a line they were unwilling to cross. A policy they were unwilling to defend. Our mission is to expand the margins of these indefensible policies to any cases of injustice.

The joy that comes from being involved in an action that successfully changes something for the better is indescribable. This is especially true when dealing with individuals for whose release we fought for such a long time. It was an immense privilege for me to work in a place that allowed me to discover and multiply such moments, amidst the madness of the daily grind and the extreme frustration with the political situation in Israel. This situation was aptly described by Franz Kafka in a text we cited in several of our court petitions:

There was once a community of scoundrels, that is to say, they were not scoundrels, but ordinary people. They always stood by each other. If, for instance, one of them had made a stranger, someone outside their community, unhappy in some rather scoundrelly way—that is to say, again, nothing scoundrelly, but just what is usual, just the normal sort of thing—and he then confessed to the whole community, they investigated the case, judged it, imposed penances, pardoned, and the like. It was not badly meant, the interests of the individual members and of the community as a whole were strictly safeguarded, and he who was supplied with the complementary color to the color he had shown:

"What? You mean you are upset about that? But what you did was a matter of course, you acted as you were bound to. Anything else would be incomprehensible. You are in a nervous condition, that's all. Pull yourself

together and be sensible.” So they always stood by each other, and even after death they did not desert the community but rose to heaven dancing in a ring. All in all it was a vision of the purest childlike innocence to see them fly. But since everything, when confronted with heaven, is broken up into its elements, they crashed, true slabs of rock³.

In this legal proceeding, we managed, for a brief moment, to reduce the abuse of those outside the community. The Hotline’s work created many such moments. They may not change – for now – the political reality, but they allow us to lift our heads up high and tell ourselves that we will keep fighting.

Adv. Assaf Weitsen was the head of the Legal Department at the HRM from 2012 to 2017. He is a private attorney who specializes in human rights, administrative law and immigration.



Freedom March, December 19th 2013. Photo by Activestills

Holot Detention Center, 2014. Photo by Oren Ziv, Activestills. (page 97-98)

Photo by Malin Fezehai. (page 96)

3. Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, p. 71-72.







Release of Unaccompanied Minors from Holot

Faisal Hassan

I was born in 1995 in the village of Imar near Zalingei in Darfur, Sudan. When the Janjaweed militia raided by village and burned it, I managed to escape with one of my brothers to Khartoum. All those who could escape did so. I managed to get a passport that said that I was 18 because 13-year-old children cannot obtain a passport in Sudan without their parents. I arrived from Sudan to Egypt, and from there, in June 2008, entered Israel. The Israeli soldiers sent me to Ketziot Prison, where I stayed for 31 days. In Ketziot, they asked me why I came to Israel. I answered all their questions and they let me go. The bus would take people from prison to Tel Aviv or to Be'er Sheva. They took us to Tel Aviv. We slept in Levinsky Park for several nights. I looked around if there are other children from Darfur who are studying in Israeli schools.

I met children who studied at the Dror School, but I could not attend classes with them, because my passport said that I was already 18. I went to Mesilla [a department in the Tel Aviv municipality assisting migrants and asylum- seekers] and told them my entire story. They helped me and this is how I was able to enroll in Dror School and study there with other children from Darfur. I studied there for two years, from 2008 until 2010, and then they sent me to a boarding school in Ben Shemen. It was very hard for me there and I always felt alone. On weekends, all the children would go to their families, and I did not have a family to go back to. I studied there for maybe two-three months and decided that I didn't want to continue like this. I left the boarding school and rented a house with a friend from Darfur who is now studying in university. In Israel, I also met relatives who arrived from my hometown in Darfur.

In 2014, instead of being allowed to renew my visa, I received a summons to the Holot Detention Center. I explained to the clerk that I studied in school in Israel and we were told that those who studied in school here are not taken to Holot. I couldn't understand and asked why they were taking me [to Holot]. It did not help. The clerk told me: 'you can go to Holot and tell them there that you studied in

Israel.' I remember that after I was there for 25 days, I met Anat from the Hotline. I told Anat that I studied in school in Israel and she told me that they would try to release me. I don't know how much time I ended up there, maybe two or three months, until they managed to release me. The Hotline got all the documents from the boarding school where I had studied and Anat got me out of Holot. Five months after I was released, I again received a summons to Holot instead of a visa. I came back to the Hotline. This time, they had to go to court, and it took time, but I did not have to return to Holot.

After I was released, I started going to meetings organized by [the NGOs] ASSAF and CIMI in Tel Aviv, meetups of teenage asylum seekers. I met many friends from Darfur there, and we became almost like a family, with teenagers from other countries as well. We wanted to do something, like military service or education, but they told us that this option is not available, but if any of us want to do national service, we can volunteer.

Managers from the Association for Volunteerism and National Service came to speak with us. If it had been possible, I would have liked to do military service, but they did not let us, so I decided to volunteer for the national service. I served for two years, between 2015-2017. During the first year, I volunteered with autistic people, and during the second year, I volunteered at a nursing home in Jerusalem. It was so much fun. I met so many people who loved me: the employees and the Israeli teens who did national service there. I made many friends there and I am still in touch with some of them.

I have a friend who studied at Ayanot [agricultural youth village and school] and works here and he asked me if I want to come check it out and work here. So I came to Ayanot and they took me in. At first, I was a maintenance worker, and now I work in the kitchen. I love this place. It's really cool. People here love me, and I love them. We have a good connection with the students.

Today, I volunteer at the Darfur Center and Darfur Star – we are working to promote our culture. I just hope there will be peace in my country. I always see what's happening in Sudan, and it seems like it's still far from where it should be, but I believe that eventually we will succeed.

Faisal Hassan was a client of the HRM from 2014 to 2015. Today he is a cook at Ayanot.

"Voices from Holot" – Exposing the Voices of Detainees in Holot to the General Public

Elizabeth Tsurkov

**"The worst thing here is knowing that they can do to us whatever they want and no one will hear, and no one will know and even if we complain – there is no one to complain to – all the authorities of the State would like us to disappear."
(Isayas, an Eritrean asylum seeker, detained in Holot)**

This is one of the hundreds of quotes collected by representatives of the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants in late 2014 from asylum seekers detained in Holot under the Fifth Amendment to the Anti-Infiltration Law. Under this version of the law, asylum seekers were forced to remain in Holot for 20 months, without being charged or convicted of a crime. Later, in August 2015, the law was amended following a High Court of Justice ruling and the detention period was reduced to one year, thanks to a petition of human rights organizations including the Hotline.

Under the law, asylum seekers were allowed to leave during the day, but were forced to stay within its confines at night. Since the facility was located near the border with Egypt and detainees received a stipend too small to cover travel, this meant that despite the theoretical right to leave, the asylum seekers there were isolated. They were out of sight of even those Israeli citizens who cared about the plight of the detainees but were largely unaware of what was happening in the detention center.

The public campaign Voices from Holot was launched to overcome the isolation of asylum seekers behind fences in the heart of the desert. The Hotline's representatives, who regularly visited Holot Detention Center, gathered hundreds of quotes from detainees about the living conditions, their feelings about being detained, what brought them to Israel, thoughts on Israel's treatment of refugees, and more. These quotes were collated in a special website created for this purpose.

The joint public advocacy campaign by the Hotline, ACRI, and Physicians for Human Rights, which I helped lead, launched in early January 2015. Before the launch we mapped out over one hundred major internet influencers on social networks popular among Israelis – Facebook and Twitter. We approached those individuals and many agreed to be among the first to participate in the campaign, ensuring that as many Israelis as possible would be exposed to its message and participate in it themselves.

Vocal artists Gilad Kahana and Alma Zohar, and social media influencers such as author Moti Foggel and journalists Esty Segal and Yaron Tan-Brink participated. Soon, their followers and friends joined as well. Thousands took part in the campaign on Facebook and Twitter and hundreds of thousands were exposed to its content. It also received media coverage from Israeli newspapers and on TV.

For me, the best sign of the campaign's success were parodies that quickly emerged, indicating that the campaign was known enough for Israeli citizens to publish jokes based on it. Our campaign used the hashtag #HolotVoices and some folks began publishing humorous posts with the hashtag #HolonVoices about life in the city of Holon, for example.

Most Israelis use social media networks just like people worldwide – to follow friends and family, spy on exes, and share cute animal videos. But in January 2015, thousands of Israelis used these platforms to give the most marginalized group in Israel, asylum seekers detained without trial in the middle of the desert, an opportunity to voice their cry. The campaign made many Israelis understand the plight of asylum seekers in Israel for the first time, and helped some feel enough empathy to join our efforts to fight for the rights of these refugees.

Elizabeth Tsurkov, a volunteer with the HRM since 2010, worked at the HRM from 2014 to 2015. She is a Research Fellow at the Forum for Regional Thinking, where she researches Syria and Iraq and is a PhD student in political science at Princeton University.

Photo by Anat Vaknin Appelbaum. (pages 103-104)





Release from the Holot Detention Center

Tesegezeb Gebremedhin

My name is Tesegezeb Gebremedhin and I am a citizen of Eritrea. I arrived in Israel in search of refuge and lived in Israel for eight years, during which I suffered from severe medical problems. These problems prevented me from taking care of myself and managing my own life and I turned to Physicians for Human Rights to obtain medical assistance. I received constant monitoring and medicine at the clinic, which allowed me to continue with my life.

One day, the Israeli government ordered me to report for detention in Holot without thinking of my medical situation. They gave me only eight days to prepare; this news caused a serious deterioration in my health, and the stress I endured was unbearable. I turned to the Hotline where I was welcomed with a smile and a great deal of patience. Alex from the Hotline took me in her car to the hearing in Holot. She represented me in the hearing before the Border Control officer and explained to him why my medical condition might deteriorate even further if I was jailed in Holot.

Luckily for me, the Border Control officer accepted her arguments and cancelled the detention order. I felt a great deal of relief. The tensions passed as did the bad thoughts. The assistance of the Hotline did not end until I was given back my stay visa. Alex told me that the doors of the Hotline would always be open to me and that I could return if I faced any other problem. I felt that the workers of the Hotline are like my parents, which helped me cope with my medical problems. Later, the Hotline assisted me in resettling to Sweden, a country that respects all of my rights and takes care of my medical needs.

My life has been completely altered and my medical condition improved significantly. I am a happy man today. I am grateful to all the people who took me out of darkness and turned me into a new man. Every time I thank God, I also thank those people who changed my life. I will forever cherish you and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Tesegezeb Gebremedhin was a client of the HRM from 2014 to 2016. He lives in Sweden.

Prevention of Deportation

International law stipulates that a person may not be deported to a place where his life or liberty is in danger, or where he will be subjected to torture. The principle of non-refoulment is the cornerstone for the protection of refugees and is enshrined in Article 33 of the Convention on the Status of Refugees as well as in other treaties. The principle has become binding in customary law, which means that states that are not party to the treaty must also respect it.

The Supreme Court of Israel ruled that the principle of "non-refoulment" applies in Israel by virtue of the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, which enshrines the fundamental right to life. State representatives have repeatedly told the courts of Israel's commitment to respect the principle. To date, however, the State of Israel has not established the mechanisms or anchored the procedures required to ensure that people it expels will not be sent into danger.

An asylum seeker may voluntarily forfeit his right to protection and return to the place where he is in danger. To ensure that his choice is unaffected by the pressure of the receiving country, international law provides tools for examination. Among other things, a decision made after incarceration and other abusive measures cannot be considered a free-willed, informed decision.

Receiving countries wishing to transfer asylum seekers to a third country should meet several conditions, beginning with the obligation that the transfer be made in accordance with open, clear, and public agreements with the third countries, which may be subjected to judicial review. These agreements must include assurances that the deportees can seek asylum in the destination country and that they will not be deported to where their lives or liberty may be in danger.

Since March 2013, the State of Israel has been encouraging the departure of asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan to the third countries of Uganda and Rwanda, offering them a financial grant of \$3,500 per person. Over the years, State authorities have deported asylum seekers who have been sheltered under the non-refoulment policy, including citizens of four different countries. An attempt by the State of Israel to deport citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during 2018 was halted

Deportation to Rwanda and Uganda

Adv. Tal Steiner

In February 2018, tens of thousands of people, asylum seekers and Israelis alike, took to the streets to protest the Israeli government's deportation plan in which asylum seekers were to be deported to Uganda or Rwanda under secretive and questionable agreements. "This deportation kills," chanted the protesters, a cry repeated in the High Court of Justice and the Knesset; in protests at the embassies of Uganda and Rwanda world-wide; in petitions signed by legal scholars, doctors, Holocaust survivors, and high school students. Fueling this amazing social protest movement, which eventually led to the abandonment of the deportation plan, were the unbearably disturbing testimonies collected from asylum seekers scattered around the world who had taken the treacherous journey to Uganda and Rwanda.

Since 2013, the Hotline and fellow organizations had worked to expose the reality behind the State's false promises, the obfuscation through claims of secret diplomatic interests, ex- parte hearings and classified documents. As part of the effort to collect these testimonies, I found myself on an Ethiopian Airlines flight to Addis Ababa in late 2017. Together with Sigal Rozen, I was tasked with collecting affidavits of recently deported asylum seekers to Uganda and Rwanda, ahead of another round of legal battles. Dawit, a determined and resourceful Eritrean young man, agreed to help us.

For ten days, we traversed the slums of Addis in a taxi decorated with images of saints. We met many men like Dawit – young and old Eritrean men who had grown sick of their miserable lives in Israel and were hoping for an opportunity to rebuild their lives. All of them described the systematic deception they encountered the moment they landed in Africa: one last slap in the face by the Israeli government, which eventually led to a life without legal status in Ethiopia, refugees again. Overcoming their fears and animus, they shared their personal stories to prevent members of the community from repeating their mistake, one which would place their lives in similar danger.

What eventually led to the abandonment of the deportation plan? Did the dozens of affidavits included in the petition to the High Court of Justice cause the judges

to question the State's declaration? Possibly, but we will probably never know. Yet the power of information works in many ways. The testimonies of those departing Israel resonated in the media and social media, leading to the recruitment of Israeli citizens, until then unfamiliar with refugee issues, who signed petitions and poured into the streets in protest. The information embarrassed Uganda and Rwanda, threatening their progressive image and leading them to issue forceful denials about any agreement with Israel, denials which undermined the State's declarations to the court about the existence of such agreements. It is possible these testimonies led the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to offer an unprecedented deal to Israel: to resettle half of the asylum seekers living in Israel in Western countries and under international supervision, which would guarantee their rights.

None of this could help the people we met, who provided us and other researchers with testimonies and affidavits. Still scattered around Africa and Europe, they continue to pay the price for the terrible mistake they made, believing the promises of the Israeli government. For me, the great happiness I felt when the deportation plan was abandoned is also mixed with deep sadness for them. I hope that knowing they played such a central role in this success, that for one moment they were able to present an unvarnished view of reality to the Israeli public that could no longer be ignored, provides them with a sense of accomplishment and perhaps even comfort.

Adv. Tal Steiner has been the head of the HRM's Legal Department since 2017.



Protest in south Tel-Aviv against the deportation of refugees to third countries, February 24th, 2018. Photo by Rutzy Klein.

Preventing the Deportation of the Congolese Community

Jean Michel Bolima

Because I had been involved in the past with different human right organizations, including the ARDC which I co-founded, most of my compatriots contacted me when they heard the news that spread through the social network: a small notice, published on the Ministry of Interior website on 7th of October 2018, mentioned that community protection was cancelled and the citizens of the Democratic Republic of Congo are required to make arrangements for departure within 90 days, no later than January 5th, 2019. I had to respond.

About 350 Congolese with their families had been granted community protection after escaping from the bloodthirsty Kabila's dictatorial regime; some had been in Israel for 20 years. For everyone concerned, the notification was unexpected, unacceptable, and even critical, especially taking into consideration the short time (90 days) given to make all arrangements for leaving Israel.

There had been no signs of improvement in the human rights situation in the Congo. And the prospect of chaos and war, consequences of the strong and demonstrated will of the Kabila regime to stay in power after the general election on 30th of December 2018, were troubling and depressing, creating a perceptible anxiety in the community.

I strongly recommended that my community contact the **Hotline**, a human rights organization I was familiar with since its establishment. I advised setting up a community meeting which would help each member to have a legal understanding of his situation, and to create an advocacy plan to change the government's decision. The Hotline is a nonprofit organization whose strong and experienced staff has worked with asylum seekers for the last 20 years. It coordinates its work with other factors and NGOs like the various legal clinics in Tel Aviv University, Kav L'Oved, ACRI, HIAS, ARDC, PHR-I, UNHCR, ASSAF, and others. I knew the Hotline had been especially successful in challenging the deportation of the Eritreans and the Sudanese only a few months earlier.

We conducted meetings, formed and agreed upon a program to make the Ministry change its plan to remove the protection from the Congolese community:

- We set up a committee of Congolese representatives and the Hotline's Public Policy Department to consult, coordinate, share and follow up all advocacy, legal and media actions.
- We held events with the Israeli public to raise awareness of the Congolese fear of deportation, using, for example, the film by Nobel Prize winner Dr. Mukwege Nobel, selected personal testimonies, and music that describes human rights violations in Congo.
- We recorded short documentaries showing Congolese testimonies for the Israel public media, as well as social media.
- We appealed to the Ministry of Interior and documented the human rights abuses in the Congo.
- We filed a petition to the Court.
- We lobbied MKs, other organizations and prominent figures in Israel society.
- We provided our personal testimonies to the Hotline Crisis Intervention Center, to prepare for protection of the most vulnerable in our community, in case the steps above were not successful.

On March 7, 2019, the Ministry informed the court that it decided to halt the deportation. The Ministry's letter was signed on February 21, but it was only delivered to the court on the last day allowed, giving two more weeks of unnecessary anxiety and fear to my community. Yet, after five months of battle and fear, it was a real relief, satisfaction and blessing.

Jean Michel fled to Israel from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2000. He received legal status in 2010 due to the government decision that granted status to his daughter and to other children of migrants. He was one of the founders of the African Refugees Development Center (ARDC), a leader in the Congolese community in Israel, and a human rights activist.

Recognizing Victims of Torture Camps in Sinai

The right to be free from torture is one of the core fundamental rights in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 5), and one of the legal principles that has earned the status of customary law, which every country in the world must follow. The prohibition on torture is also enshrined in the 1984 CAT – Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, as well as the 1966 ICCPR – Civil and Political Rights Convention, which the State of Israel signed, although it did not codify its principals in Israeli law.

Article 14 states that all parties to the Convention Against Torture are obliged to act to rehabilitate torture survivors in their territory. The United Nations Committee Against Torture has determined that signatory countries are required to establish accessible and available mechanisms for torture survivors as soon as possible after a physician's diagnosis, and to provide rehabilitation services for survivors to regain their independence as well as their physical, mental, and social capabilities.

In 2009, asylum seekers began arriving in Israel after being held in conditions of slavery and torture in camps in Sinai. Although it was apparent that the survivors were victims of slavery and human trafficking, a great deal of effort on the part of human rights organizations was needed to get the Israeli authorities to recognize them as such, because the victims were foreign nationals and the crimes were committed on foreign soil by foreign perpetrators. Only in 2010, following a Knesset hearing initiated by the HRM, did the police force begin recognizing Eritreans and Sudanese as victims of human trafficking and thus provide them with legal assistance. Over the years, the Hotline has located, identified and helped to gain legal recognition for more than 100 survivors of the Sinai torture camp as victims of human trafficking.

Today, however, there are still approximately 4,000 survivors of the Sinai torture camps in Israel, who are not recognized by the authorities and do not receive any treatment or assistance. This, despite the decision of the Executive Committee that debated the subject in 2012 and declared that: **"The State of Israel must provide a humanitarian solution for those arrived to it after being held in the Sinai torture camps."** Over the years, the State has imprisoned survivors of the torture camps in Sinai for months and even years and attempted to deport them to third countries.

Helping Torture Victims

Emi Saar

I first met Fatima in November 2006 when she reached the Hotline. Fatima arrived in Israel from a small village in Guinea Conakry when she was 16. At first, Fatima's path seemed similar to that of many other African women: escape from her country of origin, traverse the Sinai Desert, enter Israel through the border with Egypt, and struggle to survive in Israel. But details of the major events in Fatima's life transform an anonymous path into something more personal.

Escape from Guinea: Fatima was born in 1990 in a small village in Guinea. She went to school, helped at home and in the fields, and made plans for the future. When she was 15, her father told her that she would marry one of the village elders, making her his fourth wife. Fatima knew that she must accept the decision, despite her opposition to it. Luckily, she told a truck driver who delivered vegetables from the village to the capital, Conakry, about her plight, and he offered to smuggle her out of the village in his vehicle and help her leave Guinea.

Fatima accepted his offer and reached Conakry with him. Later she left the country with a group of other Guineans heading for Israel.

Sinai: When the group reached Sinai, they were forced to wait for eight days for a smuggler. Each night, the Bedouin would come to the encampment where the group was sleeping, threaten the men with rifles and take Fatima away. She was raped every night. She arrived in Israel broken, mentally and physically.

Life in the big city: Fatima and her friends reached Tel Aviv and rented an apartment. The men would go out to work and she took care of the house. One day, when returning to the apartment, she discovered that the men were gone (to this day, it is unclear what happened to them). The landlord kicked her out. After spending a few nights sleeping rough in Levinsky Park in south Tel Aviv and enduring very challenging moments, she encountered Mary, a woman from Ghana, who advised her to turn to the Hotline. Fatima reached us in a difficult state. She slept on a bench in the office for hours while we looked for accommodations for her. Luckily, the Shanti House agreed to take her in, where she stayed for a month. Later, she moved in with Mary, the same Ghanaian woman who referred her to us.

Attempts to help: Due to Fatima's young age and the brutal rape she had endured in Sinai, we turned to the Israeli Police, asking that she be recognized as a victim of modern-day slavery, shortly after the bill prohibiting this crime was codified into law. The Police claimed that it was "merely rape" but allowed Fatima to remain in Israel. We directed Fatima to the Clinic for Refugee Rights at Tel Aviv University, which labored for many years to obtain legal status for her.

Pregnancy and Birth: In the next few years, Fatima worked as a housekeeper and would come to visit me from time to time. I directed her to a computer course, helped her set up an apartment, and provided her with emotional support. Weeks, sometimes months, passed from one visit to another.

One day, after we had not met in a while, Fatima came to see me and started crying. Slowly I gathered that about two years ago, she met a migrant from West Africa, and that they began living together. Fatima became pregnant, and when she told her partner, he abandoned her. Her friends had told her that if she says she's pregnant, she would be deported, which is why she hid the pregnancy and her little girl, Esther. She had not told me or the lawyer at the Refugee Rights Clinic about this when she met with us, both while pregnant and after giving birth.

A happy ending? Over the years, Fatima would visit us with Ester, her little girl. We helped her to the best of our ability. Thanks to the resettlement program of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Fatima and Ester now live in Canada, and I keep in touch with them via Facebook.

Emi was a staff member at the HRM from 2002 to 2019. Amongst other things, she led the struggle against human trafficking.

Photos by Shula Keshet, from the exhibition *Across the Street*, 2005. (page 114)



Releasing Torture Victims

Noam Weiss

I began volunteering at the Hotline in late 2012 when I was 18, as part of my National Service. At the time, the 3rd amendment to the Anti-Infiltration Law was in effect, proscribing the open-ended detention of asylum seekers. The role of national service women at the Hotline's Crisis Intervention Center was to maintain contact with asylum seekers and migrants detained in Saharonim and Ketziot Prisons in southern Israel through phone calls and visits to the prisons, and to represent them before the Detention Review Tribunal, which extended their detention every two months.

Most of the detainees I met in my biweekly visits to the prisons were survivors of the torture camps in Sinai, from whom we collected testimonies and tried to advocate for their release from prison on "special humanitarian grounds." For many months, it felt as though we were tilting at windmills – fighting against a brutal law whose few exceptions were interpreted narrowly by the Tribunal and the courts. Almost our only hope was that the Supreme Court would void the law. This is why we were forced to explain to hundreds of asylum seekers, in detention with no end in sight, the complex legal situation and our mostly fruitless work, and try to address the difficulties they faced in detention and their frustrations.

Over time, we were able to challenge the Tribunal and the courts through petitions and appeals on behalf of torture victims, forcing them to reinterpret the "special humanitarian cases" clause, and rule when it applies to torture survivors. Following a petition to the Supreme Court and the subsequent ruling that torture may be considered a "special humanitarian grounds" for release, we worked to obtain expert opinions from social workers and psychiatrists about the mental state of torture survivors we represented.

One of the torture victims I represented before the Detention Review Tribunal, Y., who was held in the Sinai torture camps for eight months and endured particularly harsh torture, was diagnosed by a psychiatrist as suffering from PTSD. The psychiatrist found that keeping Y. in detention worsened his symptoms. I filed a request for his release and represented him in two hearings before the Detention Review Tribunal. In the first hearing, we were asked to present an alternative for detention and bring one of Y's relatives who might be able to host him. At the

second hearing, the Tribunal ordered Y's release: at the time one of the only torture survivors to be released. During the 15 months that the 3rd Anti-Infiltration Law was in effect, we were able to obtain the release of only 5 survivors of the Sinai torture camps. Throughout all of 2013, the Israeli Police recognized only 14 of the detainees as trafficking and modern-day slavery victims because they had been forced to perform unpaid labor in Sinai. Those individuals were also released from detention. It is clear why, during a period so filled with frustration and with so few successes, the sense of accomplishment on the day we released Y was incredible.

The decision to release Y. was immediate, so Gabrehiwat (our translator), Y. and I left Saharonim Prison that very afternoon, happy and excited to board a bus to Tel Aviv. Wanting to tell my friends at the Hotline about the great news, I opened my phone to discover even happier news – the Supreme Court had ruled to abrogate the 3rd amendment to the Anti-Infiltration Law! Gabrehiwat and I excitedly explained the news to Y. We struggled to wrap our heads around this joyous development the entire journey.

Unfortunately, the rest of the detainees – including the dozens of torture victims we represented – were not immediately released when the ruling was issued. The Supreme Court delayed implementation of the verdict for three months, during which the amendment remained in effect to allow the State to "prepare." During this time, some of the torture survivors we represented were released thanks to rulings of the Detention Review Tribunal, while many others remained in detention, their mental state deteriorating. Following those three months, some of them were transferred to the Holot Detention Facility, which was in operation at the time, under the 4th amendment to the Anti- Infiltration Law which the government passed at the last moment to avoid releasing the detained asylum seekers.

Our struggle to bring about the release of torture victims continued – and eventually succeeded through individual and precedent-setting cases. However, survivors of the torture camps continue to bear the mental scars, from both the torture they endured in Sinai, and their prolonged and unjust detention in Israel.

Noam Weiss was a National Service Volunteer at the HRM from 2013 to 2015. Today, she is a law and philosophy student.

Photo by Nanna Haritmann. (pages 117-118)





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The Hotline operates thanks to the generous contributions of organizations and private donors who share our worldview and support our activism. Thanks to these partners, we are celebrating 20 years of work and human rights achievements.

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As a part of our 20th anniversary, we asked some of our donors to share what led them to support us all these years:

It is my great privilege to be associated with this organization, rich in human values, and to be a partner, if only a little, in its marvelous work. During the past 15 years I have come to know the Hotline, at first from afar, and later more closely when I joined its Board of Directors. I have learned much about this amazing organization, whose staff are no less amazing, with its sense of mission, not only to provide assistance, but to make our country a better place.

20 years have passed, and the social issues with which the Hotline deals are far from receiving an enlightened solution. The Hotline, with its organizational legacy and its vision, plays an important role in dealing with the many challenges that lie before us in the field of human rights. The excellence which characterizes this organization, an excellence made possible by its management and staff, will enable the Hotline to be a key player in the field of human rights in the future as well.

Our country has been blessed by the presence of this organization; we can only hope that there will be more like it. It is my honor to be associated with it.

Dr. Ilan Cohn, Ph.D.

I have been a proud supporter of the Hotline, for I know how diligently and well it works to save the lives of people fleeing for their safety. I have been to many of the places from which they have fled in great fear, and I know the serious dangers and atrocities they seek to escape. I also have gotten to know many of the asylum seekers who have made the long and dangerous trek to Israel and have heard the stories of what they endured along the way. I feel that, as Jews, familiar with the Holocaust, we are obliged to help and protect others who could face the same fate so many Jews faced. I am horrified that Israel would recite the commandment *"But the stranger that dwells with you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt,"* but flagrantly refuse to do so the instant we are given the opportunity.

Mary Ann Stein, Moriah Fund

I began working with the Hotline three years ago when I learned of their work assisting African asylum seekers file asylum requests. The lawyers, staff, and the leaders of the organization are focused on improving the conditions of those living in Israel who find themselves dealing with all sorts of problems because they are not Israeli. I was extremely impressed by their dedication to the communities they serve. When the threat of deportation was the highest, the Hotline increased the number of lawyers on staff to face the challenges presented by the government's policies. The refugees and asylum seekers are fortunate to have the availability of the Hotline to assist them. Life is not easy for them, but the Hotline does what it can to improve their condition. Whether it is filing requests for asylum or helping solve some of the many problems they face, the Hotline stands out as an organization whose single goal is to defend and protect this vulnerable community.

I am proud of the relationship we have developed and I'm thankful for having met them and for the privilege of watching the important work they do.

Joey Low

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