

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus*  
22:20

February 2011

# "The Dead of the Wilderness"

Testimonies from Sinai Desert, 2010

*"And the bitter desert roars and shakes*

*Its burning hell core and heaven's roof"*

*The Dead of the Wilderness, H.N. Bialik*



Egypt – Israel border

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus* 22:20

During 2010 "Hotline for Migrant Workers" collected testimonies from 60 asylum seekers, mainly from Eritrea, who were victimized by the smugglers in the Sinai Desert while en route to seek refuge in Israel. Hotline volunteers met the asylum seekers in "Saharonim" Prison or after they were released from prison.<sup>1</sup> Based on these testimonies, the report reveals the torture the victims underwent, and their everyday lives in the torture camps in the desert.

*"I paid \$3,000 to the smuggler Abdullah to transfer me to Israel. He then demanded an additional \$10,000 and tortured me - hooking up the metal chains to the electricity until we fainted. I went through torture like this for two and a half months, until my relatives from the USA, Europe, Saudi Arabia and Sudan managed to collect the additional \$10,000."*

*"We, the men in the group, tried to protect the young women from the smugglers who wanted to rape them. They took us, put our legs and hands in chains and raped us as a punishment."*

*"Baha, the night guard, always looked at one of the women. We could tell that he wanted to rape her, but didn't want to leave us unwatched. One night he ordered all of us to look the other way and raped her right next to us. We heard her cries. We couldn't help her".*

*"I didn't know they were taking me to Sinai. In Sinai we were taken to Davit, from Eritrea, and two Bedouins: Khaled and Abdullah. They told us to pay to be smuggled to Israel. Only then did I understand that they wanted to transfer us to Israel."*

*"I was a virgin when I arrived in the desert. During the first few times that I was raped I cried and resisted, but that didn't help. They wouldn't leave me alone. After that I stopped resisting."<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the testimonies in the report are based on the Administrative Tribunal protocols from Saharonim Prison.

<sup>2</sup> From the testimonies given to "The Hotline for Migrant Workers." Addendum with 10 victims' testimonies is attached to this report.

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

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According to a report published by the "Research and Information Center of the Israeli Parliament", 11,763 human beings were smuggled to Israel through the Egyptian border in 2010.<sup>3</sup> A significant percentage of them, at least among Eritreans and Ethiopians, were victimized by the smugglers and had to pay a ransom for their release. Until the ransom was paid, they were held hostages in inhumane conditions and tortured. The torture was a means to extort family members in wealthy countries to send the ransom as quickly as possible. Hotline workers and volunteers collected 60 testimonies that reveal a shocking reality; 24 of the testimonies are from women and 36 are from men. Several victims claimed that they had no plans to enter Israel and that they were kidnapped from Sudan or Egypt for ransom.

## Violence, Slavery, Torture

According to some of the testimonies, several victims were either murdered by the traffickers or were starved to death. Some 18 separate testimonies report that during the summer of 2010, 18 men were forced into slave labor, the majority of them building a 3-story house for Abu Moussa, as well as a house for Abdullah, two of the traffickers.

The victims report not just physical abuse, but also psychological torture and humiliation: Seven of the victims reported that the smugglers poured urine on their heads. Two of them reported that the smugglers poured sand on their heads. Seven of the victims reported that the traffickers threatened to sell their organs for transplant.

These testimonies are reinforced by information published by "EveryOne Group," a group of Italian human rights organizations, headed by the Italian known author Roberto Malini, information provided by Fr. Mussie Zerai, president of the Italian NGO "Agenzia Habeshia"<sup>4</sup>. According to the group's report, two Eritreans were murdered on December 11, 2010, and six more Africans were shot dead in front of many refugees still being held

<sup>3</sup> The Research and Information Center of the Israeli Parliament. "The influence of Foreigners Without Work Permits on the Israeli Work Market," page 3, January 16, 2011 (referring to the number of people who entered Israel from the beginning of 2010 through December 29, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> <http://habeshia.blogspot.com/>

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

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hostage.<sup>5</sup> Another report published by the group makes one realize that removing organs for transplant may not be just an empty threat: "Four young Eritreans were taken to an illegal clinic, where they had a kidney removed. The four boys have not returned and may well have been murdered."<sup>6</sup>

## Rape

Approximately 5,000 women were smuggled into Israel through the Sinai Desert in recent years.<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to estimate how many were raped on the way. According to the testimonies collected, the majority of the women who were held by the smugglers in the Sinai Desert in 2010 were raped, many of them repeatedly. 17 of the women interviewed reported that they were raped.

This is a high number, taking into account that these women find it difficult to share their stories with strangers. In addition to the hardships faced by all rape victims, it appears that the African women face additional difficulties, as they fear their societies perceive rape as the victim's fault, an incident that the victim must hide and forget, and if it is not, the woman will be banished from the community.

The men also testified about rape. The interviewees reported that at least 34 women were raped near them. One of the men admitted that several men in his group were raped as well, as punishment for trying to prevent the rape of the young women.

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<sup>5</sup>

[http://www.everyonegroup.com/Everyone/MainPage/Entries/2011/1/11\\_Complaint\\_against\\_the\\_traffickers\\_of\\_the\\_Sinai.html](http://www.everyonegroup.com/Everyone/MainPage/Entries/2011/1/11_Complaint_against_the_traffickers_of_the_Sinai.html)

<sup>6</sup>

[http://www.everyonegroup.com/Everyone/MainPage/Entries/2010/12/1\\_Eritrean\\_Refugees\\_in\\_the\\_Sinai\\_Appeal\\_to\\_International\\_Authorities.html](http://www.everyonegroup.com/Everyone/MainPage/Entries/2010/12/1_Eritrean_Refugees_in_the_Sinai_Appeal_to_International_Authorities.html)

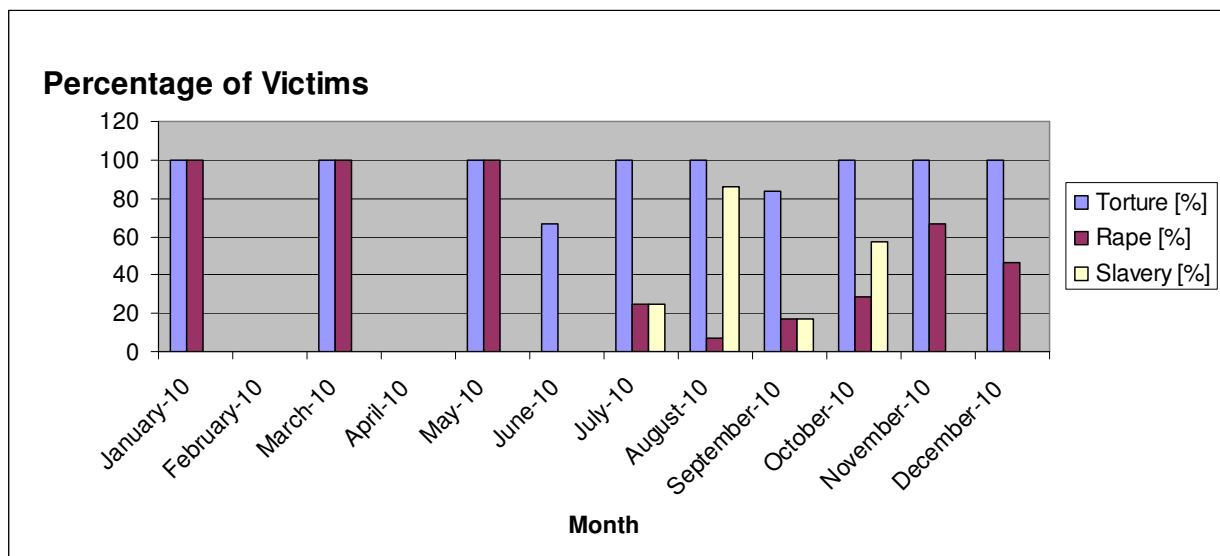
<sup>7</sup>

According to Table 13 in the UNHCR 2009 statistic report, 14% of asylum seekers who enter Israel are female.

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

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In its report - "Hostages, Torture, and Rape in the Sinai Desert" – "Physicians for Human Rights – Israel" reinforces that many cases of rape took place. PHR estimates that more than 80 of the abortions it coordinated in 2010 were for women who were impregnated as a result of rape in the desert.<sup>8</sup> While considering this data, one should keep in mind the fact that not every rape results in pregnancy.



The graph is based on testimonies of 60 asylum seekers, held by the smugglers in the Sinai desert

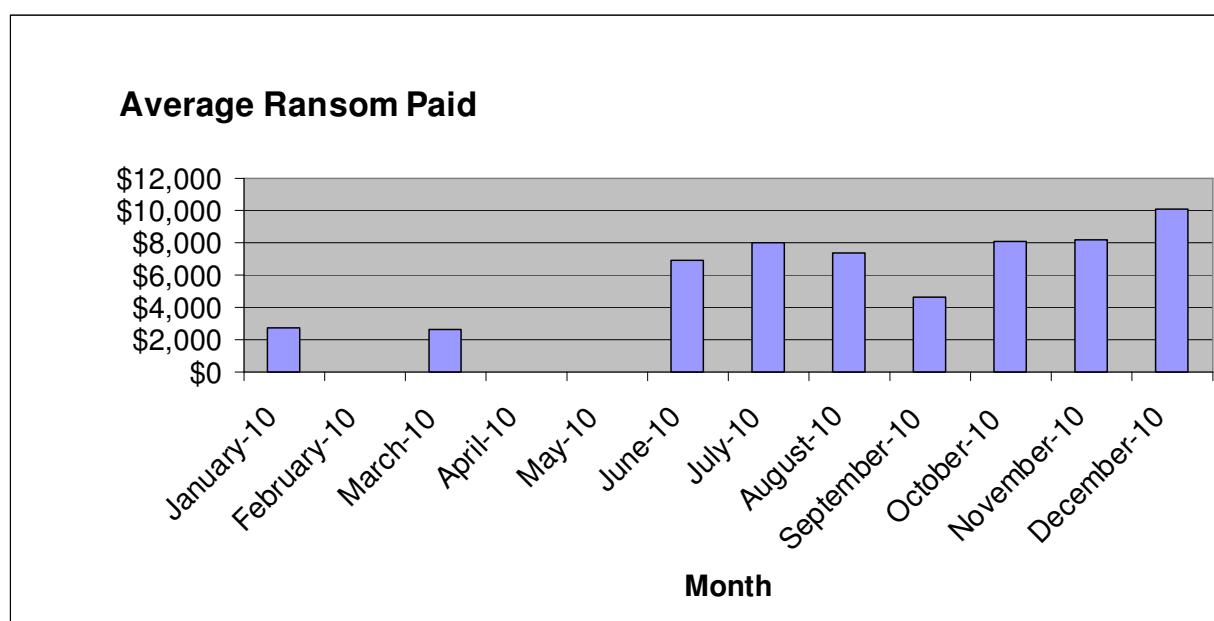
## Smugglers demand higher ransom

The testimonies emphasize that the ransom demanded by the traffickers increases regularly. The more money a terrified family is ready to try to raise, the higher the ransom demanded from the next victim. Several testimonies report that in addition to the first payment and the ransom payment demanded by the smugglers, there were victims who had to pay a third sum of money to be released from the torture camp.

<sup>8</sup> "Hostages, Torture, and Rape in the Sinai Desert" b Physicians for Human Rights – Israel.  
<http://www.phr.org.il/default.asp?PageID=100&ItemID=953>

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

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Looking at the ransom figures, one should keep in mind rumors circulating among Eritreans detained at the "Saharonim" Prison. According to these rumors, detainees should not admit to the high sums their families sent to facilitate their release from the Sinai smugglers, because this would require them to pay high bail for their release from Israeli prisons as well. Three Eritreans told Hotline volunteers that because of these rumors, they reported to the Administrative Tribunal that they only paid the traffickers \$1,500, while the actual sum was much, much higher.

## Imprisonment Period

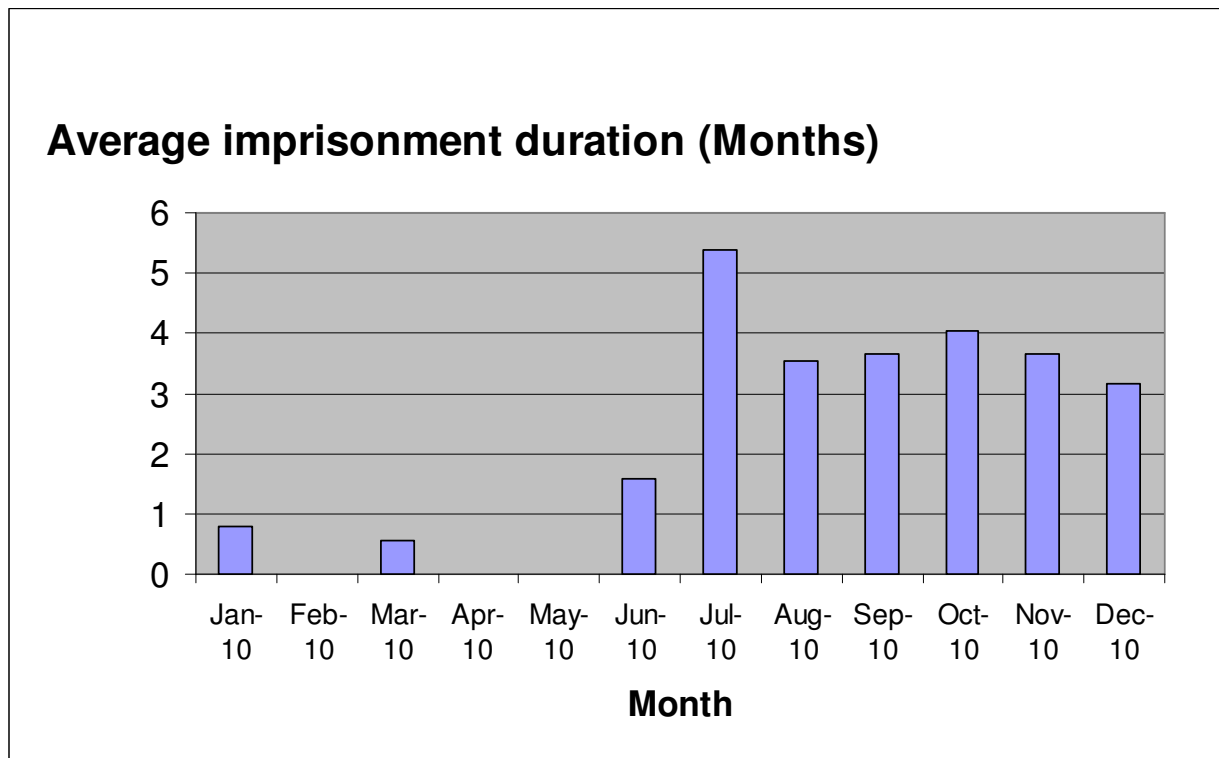
The next table shows an increase in the number of months the victims were held by the traffickers. The detention period generally depends on how long it takes the victim's family and friends to raise the ransom money. The more the ransom is increased, the more difficult it is for the families to raise the necessary amount. As a result, more victims

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

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reported longer periods of imprisonment during the second half of 2010, a direct correlation to the increased ransom demands.

The testimonies imply that some hostages were murdered when the traffickers realized that the families could not pay the ransom. However, other refugees reported that they were released despite not being able to raise the entire sum demanded. Some of them believed that they were released since new victims arrived and there was no longer room for them in the camp after several months of imprisonment.



The graph is based on testimonies of 60 asylum seekers, held by the smugglers in the Sinai desert

## The Traffickers

The testimonies reveal that the smuggling networks in Sinai are mostly run by local Bedouins and that there are several groups of smugglers, among them a group of Sudanese smugglers. The relation between the various groups varies from cooperation

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

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to fights. The testimonies reveal gang fights between Bedouins and Sudanese, kidnapping hostages or selling them while they wait for the ransom money to arrive.

The names of the traffickers are repeated in the testimonies: Abdullah, Khalid, Ahmed, Abu Moussa, Ali, Ibrahim, Muhammad, Salah, Mantsur (Abu Faisal). In some of the testimonies the first three are called Abu Abdullah, Abu Khalid and Abu Ahmed. Because the stories are similar, we assume these are the same men.

The testimonies reveal that the traffickers are using Eritrean, Sudanese, Somali and Nigerian nationals as guards, sometimes because these "guards" themselves were not able to provide the ransom demanded from them. While some of these recruits are reported to have tortured other refugees, others apparently abandoned their weapons and fled at the first opportunity, despite the considerable risks they faced.

One can gather from the testimonies that the smugglers are practicing Muslims, fasting commandment during Ramadan. The testimonies reflect hostility towards Jews and Christians, as one of the victims, M.N. described how they forced him to read the Koran and tried to convert the Christians among the refugees to Islam (see testimony no. 3). Another victim, H.F.D., testified that the traffickers cursed Jews and Christians and harassed them for wanting to reach the Jewish state, where they would be, according to the traffickers, recruited to the Jewish army (see testimony no. 2).

The religious motive in the smugglers' attitudes is even clearer when we take into account the experience of Muslim Ghanaians and Turks who recently reached Israel using the same routes. They report paying \$1,000-\$1,400 per person, with no torture or ransom demands. The only complaints expressed by the Ghanaians and Turks concerned the quality of the food and the water that the smugglers gave them.

## Enforcement against traffickers in Israel

The testimonies collected by "Hotline for Migrant Workers" are reinforced by harsh indictments submitted to the Jerusalem Magistrates Court on January 21, 2010 regarding



## Hotline for Migrant Workers

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extortion, enslavement and human trafficking. These indictments were filed against Nagassi Habatti, an Eritrean national, and Fitwi Mahari, an Ethiopian national, both of whom reside in Israel. According to the charge sheet, the two were part of an Egyptian-Eritrean gang that transferred asylum seekers to Israel through Egypt, taking them hostage and blackmailing their relatives in order to set them free. According to the indictment, the asylum seekers were forcibly held hostage by the gang, severely tortured and abused, held in very harsh physical conditions and had to contact relatives in Israel or their home countries by phone in order to collect ransom money to ensure their release to Israel.<sup>9</sup>

As far as we know, this is the only case to date in which Israeli residents have been accused of involvement in crimes committed against asylum seekers trying to reach Israel. The two men were released on bail and are now on house arrest while their trial continues. In the above-mentioned report, the EveryOne Group claims that Fitwi Mahari cooperates with Khalid, the trafficker who ordered the murder of two Eritrean men last month. In its June 2010 report, "Hotline for Migrant Workers" assumed additional Israeli collaborators are involved with the criminals in Egypt.<sup>10</sup> Relatives of the victims who reside in Israel reported that traffickers who operate collaborators inside Israel (as in other countries) contact the relatives and extort the ransom money from them in order to transfer it to the smugglers in the Sinai Desert. "Hotline for Migrant Workers" facilitated the arrest of two such collaborators, while they were meeting with a relative of one of the victims. Despite the fact that the collaborators were caught with large and unexplained sums of money, they were released after several days. Hotline's legal department believes that these collaborators can be brought to trial for aiding and abetting enslavement. Hotline is following the case at the Saar police unit, which is investigating it.

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<sup>9</sup> Hananel, Ayala. "Trafficking Refugees: They Are Blackmailed With Torture." *Walla*, January 21, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> "Hotline for Migrant Workers" and "Kav Laoved", "Human Trafficking and Exploitation of Female Migrant Workers and Asylum Seekers", June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010:

[http://www.hotline.org.il/english/pdf/Hotline\\_and\\_Kav\\_Laoved\\_Human\\_Trafficking\\_060810\\_WL\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.hotline.org.il/english/pdf/Hotline_and_Kav_Laoved_Human_Trafficking_060810_WL_Eng.pdf)

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### **Summary and Recommendations**

This document includes a translated addendum with 10 detailed testimonies of five men and five women, eight of them Eritreans, one Ethiopian and one Sudanese, out of the 60 testimonies collected by Hotline volunteers and an Administrative Tribunal judges at "Saharonim" Prison in 2010. The testimonies, taken from different people who arrived in Israel at different times and with different groups, depict a harsh reality of merciless, as well as ongoing and wide-spread cruelty by the smugglers toward the asylum seekers.

Despite the fact that the crime was not committed on Israeli soil, and Israel cannot bring the smugglers and the majority of their collaborators to justice, it must recognize the victims of these gross offenses as victims and grant them the rights to which such victims are entitled.

**Israel should invest the necessary resources to bring to trial the collaborators who reside in Israel.**

**"Hotline for Migrant Workers" calls the State of Israel to demand that the Egyptians take action against the traffickers and that Israel assist the Egyptians in taking action against them along the border.**

**"Hotline for Migrant Workers" calls on the international community to do anything it can to persuade Egyptian authorities to stop the horrifying and illegal actions their citizens are committing against human beings in the Sinai Desert, whose only crime is their desire to reach Israel to seek asylum.**

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# **Addendum of Testimonies of Victims Of Slavery, Torture and Rape in the Sinai Desert**

### **1. Testimony provided by T.L.S., an Eritrean woman, Spent 8 months in the desert**

I'm a 19-year-old citizen of Eritrea. I'm married and I have a young child who remained with my family in Eritrea. I entered Israel on December 21, 2010.

On March 2010, when I was still in Sudan, I agreed to pay the smugglers \$2,500 to transfer me to Israel. When I arrived in Sinai, the smuggler sold me, along with a group of other people, to another smuggler named Abdullah. Abdullah demanded an additional \$10,000 from me. I had no way to raise that sum of money. Abdullah raped me for five days and two other smugglers raped me as well. I wanted to resist but I had no strength and the smugglers nearly strangled me during the rape. As a result of all these rapes, I got pregnant and I'm now seven months pregnant. During this time, I was chained to another woman. We received food every few days and I managed to wash myself three times during that entire period. Only after eight months was my father able to send the smugglers \$5,000; they released me and allowed me to cross the border to Israel. I must have an abortion. My husband should not know what happened to me in the desert and I must not give birth to this child.

### **2. Testimony provided by H.F.D., an Eritrean man, Spent 6 months in the desert**

I am a 22-year-old Christian Eritrean national. I entered Israel on October 31, 2010 after being held in the Sinai Desert for six months.

I didn't want to serve in the Eritrean army, and for a long time I was able to evade the authorities. When they started coming to my house often to look for me, I decided to flee.

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus* 22:20

In May 2010, I crossed the border to Sudan. From Sudan I continued to Israel, because Eritreans in my village had already reached Israel, and conveyed that things there are fine. They didn't say that getting there was so difficult.

In Sudan a mediator and I agreed that I would pay \$2,500 to be smuggled to Israel. But when we got to Sinai, the smuggler, Abdullah, demanded that I add \$500. I added that amount, but instead of transferring me to Israel, he shut me in a house and tied up my legs with a metal chain. I was tied up for nearly three months, along with seven other people. Because we were chained to each other and couldn't get out, we urinated and defecated where we were. We tried to dig a hole and cover it afterwards. Because there were so many of us and we were so crowded and couldn't shower, the smell was awful. The smugglers would come in with masks and take us outside to beat us, because they couldn't stand the stench. They would hit our genitalia, force us to lift our legs and electrocute us.

There were five women in the group jailed with me. Abdullah would take the women out every day and rape them. He also told the other smugglers that they could rape the women.

Baha, the night guard, always looked at one of the women. We could tell that he wanted to rape her, but didn't want to leave us unwatched. One night he ordered all of us to look the other way and raped her right next to us. We heard her cries. We couldn't help her.

For two months, more and more people joined our group, until there were more than 200 of us. Abdullah didn't ask us for money. He would just threaten to sell our kidneys. After two months, Abdullah told us that the Eritreans in Sudan stole money from him, and we need to return that money to him. They transferred me and 81 other people to another house, where a young man named Mansour waited for us. As soon as we arrived, he began to hit us and demanded an additional \$7,000. Mansour and the others beat the bottoms of our feet and electrocuted us, leaving marks on my body. The women were

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22:20

beaten in the same way. If they didn't agree to leave with the smugglers, they would beat them even harder.

One of the young women was very pretty. She had already paid \$3,000 and when the smugglers asked for more money, she called her father and told him that she needed \$7,000 more for the smugglers, so that they would free her from the desert captivity. Her father didn't believe that the smugglers used Israeli mobile phones, which is why the calls were from an Israeli number. Her father was sure that she was trying to get him to send her more money. For six months all of the Bedouins who were there raped her repeatedly. She was impregnated. One of the other prisoners offered to be her partner, and she agreed, because she probably understood that she wouldn't be able to get out otherwise.

One of the smugglers who abused us was a Somali national. Before the money arrived for me, there was a holiday and the smugglers left just the Somali and a Nigerian guy to watch over us. One of the women, who had a little baby and therefore wasn't tied up with us, managed to bring something sharp over to cut the chains. 58 of us who were tied up managed to get away. We tied up the Somali and Nigerian and fled. Abdullah, with a large group of Bedouins, chased after us, and when they reached us they shot and killed four people who were armed. They managed to catch 22 of us, and when they brought us back to camp, they asked the Somali guy, Nur, who initiated the escape. He pointed at me and Abdullah knocked me to the ground. He stepped on my neck and called on all of the Bedouins to hit me.

Abdullah would say that they were righteous for beating Christians. He said that when we reached Israel we would be soldiers and added, "Our faith is the dollar. When we get the dollar, we'll go back to our faith."

Towards the end of my stay in the desert, the guards would unchain us at night and make me and other people work in construction. I couldn't refuse to work, because they would kill me. I was a laborer, working on the construction of Abdullah's house. I worked

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus* 22:20

for about a month, just at night so that the soldiers and police officers wouldn't see us. I wasn't paid for my work.

I was in Sinai for a total of six months. During that period I was hungry, because the smugglers gave us porridge once a day. That entire period I didn't take a single shower, and I had lice. Family members eventually sent \$7,000, and I was transferred to someone else, who took me to the Israeli border the next day.

### **3. Testimony provided by M.N., a Sudanese man, Spent 6 months in the desert**

I am 35-years-old, the son of a Muslim father and a Christian mother. When I was young, my mother died and my aunt adopted me and helped me with my studies. I decided to adopt the faith of my aunt and mother and converted to Christianity. When I completed my studies I returned to my father's family, and they didn't accept me because I had converted. I decided to work with a Christian organization in Sudan, and my brothers from my father's side reported me to the authorities. I was arrested in 2006 and was imprisoned in Shale Prison until 2008. When I was released from prison, I wanted to flee Sudan, but I learned that the authorities barred me from doing so. A church member helped me obtain a Sudanese passport, and together we left for Northern Sudan, where people helped me deceive the security authorities and flee.

I flew to Cairo on February 10, 2010. I didn't want to stay in Egypt and I didn't go to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees there, because I knew many Sudanese who appealed to UNHCR there and spent many long, difficult years in Egypt. I heard about Israel and knew about it from Bible stories. I knew a lot about the Jews, from the days of Abraham and Isaac through Netanyahu. I love Israel, because it is the Holy Land. The Christian organization I worked for helped raise \$2,500 for me, so that I could reach Israel. In Cairo I met a smuggler; at the time I didn't know he was Bedouin. He took

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus* 22:20

\$1,200 from me, and I was supposed to give \$1,300 to another Bedouin agent on the Israeli border.

A group comprised of 13 Sudanese and 45 Eritreans set out for the desert. Among the Eritreans were 16 women and three young children. They divided up the members of our group. Later I understood that they usually transfer young children quickly. They like to leave the girls and women with them. They brought me to a Bedouin's home in the desert. There I met five Eritrean women and 15 Eritrean men. We were 21 people at the Bedouin's home in Sinai, and we stayed there five months, until October 10, 2010.

The day we arrived, four of the smugglers told the women that they would take them to the showers. I told them not to go. One of the women, who was 18, went with them and came back crying. One of the women, who also spoke English, later told me that they had raped the girl. After that they would take the women and rape them daily. I tried to prevent them from taking the women, and they beat me with a stick on my shoulder – I still have marks. They claimed that these women were not my sisters and were not married to me, and therefore it was none of my business what they do with them. The women cried and yelled in a way that kept me up at night, for the entire time we were there. After three months there, I asked the women, through the woman who spoke English, and learned that none of them had menstruated on time. Some didn't realize that they were pregnant.

The place we stayed for that entire period was some kind of pen with a fence that formed three rooms, with a cloth roof. There were no restrooms or showers there, and we didn't take showers the entire time we were there. We slept on the sand. Those of us who had a change of clothes slept on them. I used my coat as a blanket when it was very cold at night. We wore the same clothes, with no chance of washing them or ourselves. Every morning at 11:00 A.M., they would bring us Egyptian bread – pita with beans. If I was nice sometimes I'd get another meal with cheese or potatoes. There was a water tank far

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus* 22:20

from where we were staying, and we would get a 1.5 liter bottle of water every day. When it was very hot they gave each person two bottles.

The Bedouins didn't know that I also spoke Arabic. I heard them say that they raped the women. When they realized that I spoke Arabic, they brought me a Koran and tried to make me convert the others to Islam. The smugglers said that if I didn't succeed, I'd be the last one released. During the fast in Ramadan, they didn't give us food during the day. They said, "You want to cross the border to reach our enemies. We the Arabs don't like the Israelis, so why are you going there?"

During that period they beat us repeatedly. The smugglers asked whether we knew anyone in Israel or Europe and asked for our relatives' phone numbers. They would call our relatives and then bring a stick and beat us so that we could be heard shouting and crying. They told our relatives that if the money arrived that day, we'd be in Israel the following day. Sometimes they asked for \$2,500 and sometimes for an additional \$3,000. The more someone cried when they were beaten, the more money their relatives would send. There were some who were only sent another \$1,000, and they were released. We told them we'd work in Israel and send them money, but they wouldn't let us go. I told them I had nothing aside from the \$1,300 they had forcibly taken from my pocket, which is why they tortured me and said that I would be released last. The smugglers displayed all sorts of weapons they had, threatened us and fired in the air several times to frighten us.

God did not make females as strong as males, and beating them while they were on the phone with their relatives was enough to make them cry. One of the women whose sister lived in Sweden was released after her sister sent an additional \$3,500. Even after the money arrived, they didn't immediately release people. They waited a few days for the wounds to heal a little. They didn't help us treat the wounds, and we treated them ourselves with our clothes. One of the women was released during the World Cup in South Africa, in June 2010, and two others were released in August 2010, after being



## Hotline for Migrant Workers

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22:20

imprisoned for six months. When I got to the desert I weighed 85 kilograms. During the period of my detention in the desert I lost 30 kilograms.

On the night of October 10, 2010 the Bedouins decided to release me and two Eritrean men who were jailed with me. A Bedouin boy with a machine gun took the three of us to some mountain and told us where to cross. When we crossed the mountain I couldn't move because I was so weak and hungry. The Eritreans ran and left me behind. I waited there all night, without water, and in the morning I saw five female soldiers and one male soldier, all of them young, and they spoke Hebrew. I answered them in English. They checked my clothes. They took \$100 from me that I had managed to hide from the Bedouins, my passport and cellular phone with the numbers of all of the people dear to me. My physical condition was dire. They took me to some army place.

They gave me a mattress, blanket, pillow and water. One person gave me an infusion. The soldiers were with me for two days, and on October 13 or 14 an officer – I don't know if he was from the police or army – asked me questions. One of the female soldiers told me that I was leaving them. At night they told me to get out of bed, put me in a car and took me to the Eritreans who started to cross the border with me. They put us on a bus and we drove to another base, five hours away. We stayed there for three days. We were given food and water, and I was able to take a shower and wash my clothes. I was given a shot in my arm. I told them that the army had my passport and phone and they said that I should ask about them at the base. In the interview I stated all of this, and then they brought me to the court. I told the judge about my phone, money and passport. The judge called and said they would bring my passport. From there they took me to a hospital in Beer Sheva and examined me. Then a policeman arrived with a document for me and they released me. I asked for my passport and phone, and the man said that when my passport arrived they would call me. I was afraid to complain and didn't say anything.

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus* 22:20

### **4. Testimony provided by A.I.S, an Eritrean woman, Spent 6 months in the desert**

I'm 21-years-old. I worked my entire life as a shepherd in my village in Eritrea, and I never went to school. In April 2010 I left Eritrea for Sudan, hoping to find a good job. I didn't plan to come to Israel. I hadn't heard of this country when I was in Eritrea. When I crossed the border between Eritrea and Sudan, a soldier caught me and demanded money. I had no money, and that soldier transferred me to Bedouin smugglers, who transferred me and many other people to Sinai. I didn't know they were taking me to Sinai. In Sinai we were taken to Davit, from Eritrea, and two Bedouins: Khalid and Abdullah. They told us to pay to be smuggled to Israel. Only then did I understand that they wanted to transfer us to Israel.

The smugglers demanded that each person pay \$2,800 to be released. They tied our legs with metal chains so that we couldn't escape. Fifteen people were tied up with one chain. One leg was chained. My leg was chained for seven months, until I came to Israel. Whoever paid the money that they demanded would be released and sent to Israel. I remained chained, and from time to time new people who had arrived in Sinai would join me. I couldn't pay for my release because I had no money. I have an uncle in Saudi Arabia, and I hoped that he would send money for my release, but I didn't have his phone number. So that we would convince our relatives to send money, the smugglers beat our shins with a stick. They also burned our arms and legs with a plastic stick with hot metal at the end. I still have wounds and scars from the beatings and the burns. We got food once a day and water twice a day, and we were very hungry.

During my last three months in Sinai, Khalid and Abdullah would unchain me at night and take me to a hut near the bathroom, where they raped me, one after the other, almost daily. There was another woman who they would take along with me, and they would rape us together. Later they took her to another house and I never saw her again. I was a

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus* 22:20

virgin when I arrived in the desert. During the first few times that I was raped I cried and resisted, but that didn't help. They wouldn't leave me alone. After that I stopped resisting.

After being held there for six months, people from Eritrea arrived who also had relatives in Saudi Arabia. I asked them to look for my uncle there. When we got in touch via the smugglers' phone, I told him that I was in Sinai and asked him for help. Only when the \$2,800 arrived did the smugglers unchain me. They transferred me to someone named Ibrahim on December 6, 2010, and he transferred me and 30 other people to the Israeli border.

### **5. Testimony of G.B.T., an Eritrean man, Spent 5 months in the desert**

I am a 25-year-old Eritrean national. I arrived in Israel on August 14, 2010. I agreed to pay the smugglers \$2,500 to smuggle me into Israel via Sinai. However, in Sinai a smuggler by the name of Abu Moussa bought me and some other people from our smuggler and demanded that each of us add \$5,000. I didn't have any way to pay such a sum, so I was chained with three other people.

The smugglers physically abused us. I was beaten with an electric cable all over my body, and I was beaten with a whip around my ears. Now I can't hear very well in my left ear. Also, during three weeks one of the smugglers would take bottles filled with urine and dump them on our heads. The smugglers gave us porridge once every two or three days.

I was tied up in a metal chain for four months. Some of those held in the camp were given t-shirts with numbers printed on them, and they were referred to by the number on their shirt.

## **Hotline for Migrant Workers**

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus* 22:20

After the money that Abu Moussa demanded had arrived, he didn't release me. He waited two more weeks, and only when new people arrived and there was no more space for me, did he unchain me. After I was released, I was forced to work in manual labor. I worked for a week, from morning to evening, building a house for Abu Moussa's brother. I was not given any money for this work.

### **6. Testimony provided by T.M.A., an Eritrean woman, Spent 5 months in the desert**

I am a 21-year-old Christian Eritrean, born in Sudan. I arrived in Israel on December 14, 2010.

My family and I returned to Eritrea in 1995. I gave birth to a son in 2009, whom I left with my family when I returned to Sudan.

I reached an agreement with an agent in Sudan on a sum of \$2,500 in order to get to Israel. When I got to Sinai, the smugglers – Abu Abdullah and Abu Moussa – asked me for \$2,850. Later they demanded an additional \$7,000. To get me to pay the extra money, they chained me by my legs to five other women. The smugglers would call my family members and beat my arms and legs with a rubber hose, so that my relatives would hear me scream. I was also very hungry because we only got flour porridge once every two days. During my last two months there I wasn't chained because I would help distribute water and cleared the excrement of the prisoners who were chained.

On December 14, 2010, five months after I set out for the desert, my relatives were able to collect and send \$7,000, and only then did the smugglers let me cross the border to Israel. After several days I was transferred to "Saharonim" Prison, where I am today.

### **7. Testimony provided by V.S.P., an Ethiopian woman, Spent 4 months in the desert**

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus*  
22:20

I am an Ethiopian citizen. I entered Israel in early July 2010. I was imprisoned by smugglers in the Sinai Peninsula for four months. During the first week I was imprisoned with a group of Eritreans. After a week a Bedouin by the name of Muhammad, who guarded the camp, took me and two other women, under the pretext that we were going to clean houses. Muhammad sent us to two other Bedouins who raped us several times and returned us to the encampment in the morning. The next day, when Muhammad came to take us at night, we refused to go with him and he started to beat us and take us by force. Every night the Bedouins raped us a number of times. When they inserted their sexual organs into me I would throw up, even though I had barely eating anything.

When I got to Sinai I was a virgin, and the two Bedouins that raped me tore my hymen and I bled. The first one that raped me cleaned the blood with a sheet, and then the second one raped. I screamed and cried, but it didn't bother them. I couldn't do anything.

After about a month, Muhammad took me from the encampment to another hut that did not have additional people inside. I was closed in this hut for three months. The hut was locked from the outside with a key so that I wouldn't be able to leave. There was no furniture at all whatsoever and I slept on the ground. During these three months, Muhammad came twice a day, every day, raped me, hit me, and yelled at me. He tried to communicate with me in Arabic, but I don't understand Arabic, so he would get annoyed and hit me. I requested and begged that he would stop, but it didn't help.

During these three months, Muhammad would bring me an empty pita and a bottle of water each day. That was all I had to eat, and sometimes there were days that Muhammad didn't bring me anything. For two months I didn't take even one shower. I had a scarf that I had brought from Eritrea, and I would clean myself with that. I had to go to the bathroom outside and only when Muhammad would come and let me out under his supervision. My head was full of lice throughout this period.

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

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After three months, Muhammad took me back to the hut that I had been imprisoned in when I got to Sinai. The hut was already full of new people from Eritrea. Muhammad told me that my family had sent money. Two days later, Muhammad brought and a group of Eritreans to the Israeli border, and we crossed the border.

### **8. Testimony provided by S.T., an Eritrean man, Spent 4 months in the desert**

I am a Christian Eritrean, 36-years-old, the father of six children ranging in age from 1-13. I arrived in Israel on November 16, 2010.

I served in the Eritrean army for 16 years, during which I was given a one-week vacation once a year. I wasn't present when my children were born and wasn't there to raise them. Four years ago, during my annual vacation, I felt that I couldn't return to the army and leave my wife and four small children again for such a long period of time without seeing them. I stayed with my family for a year, evading those who tried to take me back to the army. When I was caught, a year later, I was held in detention for two years, in extremely harsh conditions. After I got out, when I realized that there was no release date for my military service, that I wouldn't be able to see my children grow up and wouldn't be able to try to support them, I decided to flee Eritrea.

On July 13, 2010 I crossed the border to Sudan, where I heard about friends who had reached Israel, and decided to try as well. In Sudan, the smugglers asked us for \$2,500 to be smuggled to Israel. We set out for the desert in a group of 28 people, including 10 women and a 3-year-old boy. We stayed for a month in Kassala with the Bedouins, until enough people joined. The journey to Sinai took twenty days, driving during the day and sleeping on the sand at night. Once a day we got two slices of bread, something to spread on it and two glasses of water.

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus*  
22:20

Four Bedouins accompanied us from Sudan to Sinai and transferred us to four other Bedouins. The Bedouins in Sinai told us that they had bought us for a high price and that we must pay them back for the money they had spent on us.

The Bedouins who had brought us to Sinai beat us with sticks and with their weapons. They beat the women as well, but they were crueler to the men. The Bedouins in Sinai beat us several times a day. They asked us for our relatives' phone numbers and would call them and beat us so that they would hear us crying for help.

In addition to the Bedouins, there was an Eritrean who oversaw us, who couldn't pay the Bedouins and was left to work for them. The women were not left with us. They were held in a separate hut, and we could hear them being beaten and crying for help.

Our legs were chained to one another. After some time, four other people and I were transferred to another hut, where many people were also chained together. We were there for 15 more days. The Bedouins claimed that we had incited the others not to pay them, and were demanding an additional \$ 500 from us, in addition to the sum demanded from all the others. It took my relatives long time to collect and send \$ 9,000, in addition to the \$2,500 I had paid originally, and only then was I transferred to another hut, where we waited until they let us cross the border.

On November 16, 2010, more than four months after I set out for the desert, I crossed the border into Israel with a group of 12 men and six women. The woman and her 3-year-old son stayed behind, but later they also reached "Saharonim" Prison. The Egyptians did not shoot at us on the way, and the entire group managed to cross the border. We waited for IDF soldiers. When the soldiers arrived they asked us to undress, to check that we didn't have weapons. They asked us in English for our names and asked who brought us to Israel. They didn't ask us why we came to Israel. After a night on the base they transferred us to "Saharonim" Prison. After a month in prison, I was released, with restricted conditions and without a work permit.

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

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### **9. Testimony provided by Y.E.T., an Eritrean woman, Spent 2 months in the desert**

I am a 22-year-old citizen of Eritrea. I entered Israel on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010. I ran away from Eritrea to Sudan one year ago.

In Sudan, I agreed to pay smugglers \$2,500 to cross the border to Israel. When I arrived in Sinai, the smugglers took us towards the Israeli border three times, but each time they told us that it was impossible to cross and brought us back to the desert. Abu Moussa came to us with Filimon, an interpreter from Eritrea, and told us that the money we had paid them was stolen, and therefore each one of us needs to pay another \$5,000. He said that if we would not pay him, he would sell us to organ traffickers who would sell our kidneys. According to him, he could receive \$25,000 for each kidney. I was genuinely frightened that he intended to follow through with his threat.

That day they tied us up with a metal chain; the guard, Muhammad, had the key. There were two to three women bound together, either by the hands or by the feet. My hands were tied to the legs of another woman, so that we would not be able to escape. We sat inside a closed hut, along with another 10 other women who were tied up. To use the bathroom we went out in pairs or in threes, only with the guard's permission. If the guards wouldn't let us go out to the bathroom, we would have to relieve ourselves into bottles in the hut, and then they would release one of the women or an older Eritrean man in the tent with us, so that we could empty the content of the bottles.

Once a day, at around 3:00 A.M., the smugglers would give us flour and we would make porridge. They would only let us drink once a day, one glass of water per person, after the porridge. Sometimes they gave just one glass of water to two women. Every day throughout that period the smugglers demanded that we each pay \$5000 and beat us in order to convince our relatives to send them the money. Abu Moussa would beat me often with a plastic rod on my back; it was very painful.



## Hotline for Migrant Workers

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Several times, Abu Moussa called my parents in Eritrea and spoke with them, and then his brother would beat my face and ears so that my parents would hear me cry and scream. Abu Ahmad would tell my parents that if they don't pay, they will kill me and sell my kidneys. Once, when there were just five women in a hut, they brought two Ethiopian men told them that they could rape us at night. After the Bedouins left, the Ethiopians told us that they wouldn't hurt us and requested that we just sit quietly and not tell the smugglers that we weren't raped.

In the end, after two months, my family was able to raise and send \$5,000, and then the smugglers sent us to an additional smuggler who worked with them, and he smuggled me across the Egyptian border into Israel. Three women from my group stayed in Sinai because the smugglers didn't get the demanded ransom.

### **10. Testimony provided by M.A., an Eritrean man, Spent 1 months in the desert**

I'm Christian, single and 23-years-old. I arrived in Israel from Eritrea on November 23, 2010.

I got to Israel after eight months of military service in Eritrea, during which I realized what my life would be like – no freedom, no salary, no chance of living in my home.

In January 2010 I fled the army and crossed the border to Sudan. There I went to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and lived in the Shagarep Refugee Camp for ten months. Life in the camp was hard, and when I heard about the option of reaching Israel, I decided to try my luck.

The group I tried to reach Israel with had four trucks, with 25 Eritreans on each one. There were 14 women and four children in the group.

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus* 22:20

The journey from Sudan to the Sinai Desert took one week. Every night the smugglers stopped the cars and told us to sleep somewhere. Everyone got a glass of water a day and some bread. Some of us had cookies as well. The smugglers had weapons and would forcefully cover us. If we moved they would beat us. They were violent before we reached the Sinai Desert. They would beat the women, but not the children. They didn't beat me on the way, only in Sinai.

It was agreed that we would pay \$3,000 to be smuggled into Israel. When we got to the desert, they asked us for an additional \$10,000. I was relatively lucky compared to the others, as my family transferred the money within ten days and I was released. Every time the smugglers took some people, they would beat them with a plastic stick. My group lived in a building that week, and they didn't bind our arms and legs. Later I heard from others that they were handcuffed and that their legs were chained that entire period.

That week some 120 people gathered, waiting for money from their relatives abroad, with no roof over their heads. Eritreans whom the smugglers knew had arrived from Libya were placed in a separate building and were asked to provide more money, apparently because they knew they planned to reach Europe, where they probably had family. They didn't request additional money from me personally, but they made me call my family and when they answered the phone I was beaten with a stick so that I would shout and cry. To this day I don't know how exactly the money reached them. I think the smugglers have people who collect the money for them.

When the money arrived, the smugglers released us in groups. I was one of the first to be released, crossing the border in a group of ten men on November 23, 2010. Many of the people I met in the yard and building, who had gotten there before me, stayed after me, as did the women.

When we reached the road an IDF vehicle drove by and picked us up. The soldiers asked whether there were more people in the group, and when we said no they brought

## Hotline for Migrant Workers

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - *Exodus* 22:20

us to a military base. They interrogated each of us for five minutes, asking for our name, nationality and age. They didn't ask why we had left Eritrea.

After two days on the base, they transferred us to "Saharonim" Prison, where we stayed for a month. In "Saharonim" I heard about a lot of people who were caught by the Egyptians. God helped me get here; I could have gotten caught as well. Many people were asked to provide large sums of money that they couldn't pay. I was lucky and they didn't ask me. I never imagined that the journey would be like that. In "Saharonim" I heard from other detainees who had been forced to pay \$13,000 to get here.

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