

**PRAYERS  
OF HOPE  
FROM  
AFRICAN  
REFUGEE  
WOMEN  
AND  
GIRLS  
IN OUR  
MIDST**



Maisha seeks at all times to appreciate the stories of people and contribute to current debates in our country, as we wrestle with difficult international events both politically and economically. We remind ourselves and others that at the heart of these debates, there are needy people.

However we understand the situation of migrants/refugees/asylum seekers; we need to appreciate their journeying and the difficulties of such journeys and the reasons for such journeys. Perhaps these prayers can help us to understand their situations and appreciate the beating hearts of people whose journeys are never care-free and whose lives are sometimes permanently scarred.

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For the ease of reading through the book we have divided the prayers into three sections:

STARTING THE JOURNEY

THE PERILS OF THE JOURNEY

MY DESTINATION?

**PRAYERS OF HOPE FROM AFRICAN REFUGEE  
WOMEN AND GIRLS IN OUR MIDST**

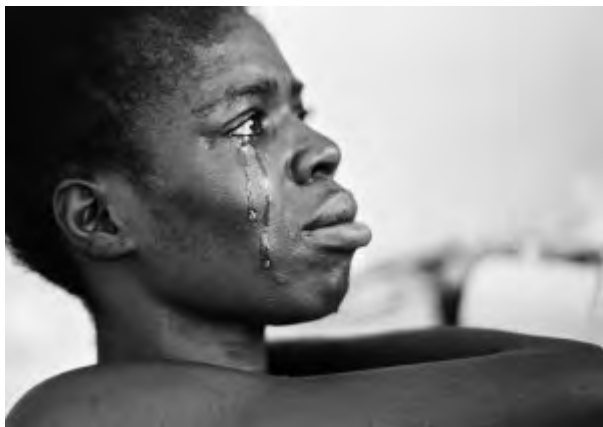
**TWO EXCERPTS FROM THE PRAYERS**

*... My girls are now fifteen and both elderly grandmothers and aunts want them circumcised and ready for marriage. My man and I never wanted this for our girls, and now he is gone, we no longer have a protector. In one week's time there is a ceremony planned and we expect that we should be leaving before that special occasion. We have talked about this for a year and now we have decided to leave our village and our country, as nowhere in our country is safe. ... (p.7)*

*Last night it was not about sexual favours for food, this was brutal, this was violence, this, was rape. I had fallen into a deep sleep and when I came around, I had a hand over my mouth and I was been carried away from the camp by men. One explained in the darkness that if I screamed, I would die, so my life was in my hands. How many there were I cannot remember, but whether three or four I passed out at some stage and awoke to find some of the women crying and calling my name. ... (p. 15)*



**STARTING MY JOURNEY**



## **1. TAKING THE FIRST STEP**

God the Merciful, I have never left my village before, and now I am leaving my country, as I am tired of seeing my children without food and hope, and my physically-challenged husband full of despair. I have always been with my children and I have known no other life, so lead me in the right path, so that I can find work to support my family. I can cook, clean and look after children, may you find me a way to fulfil the dreams we have for our children and may this separation be short.

## **2. A PRAYER FOR UNDERSTANDING**

God the Merciful, we did not come to this decision without thinking about our troubles over the years. Our children cannot attend school and our relatives are themselves poor, so we have become a burden for the rest of the family. Nobody visits anymore and our families never seem happy to see us. So we are doing this in the hope that the trafficker can be proved right, I will repay him from my wages and then I can send money home to help my husband, who cannot work, and the children, as any money is better than nothing. I have never been a bad mother or an unfaithful wife, so may I not be condemned by my village and my family.



### **3. LEAVING**

Dear God, I never wanted things to be like this, and for a number of years we managed to keep the demands of the families away, but since my husband died the pressure of the family is relentless. My girls are now fifteen and both elderly grandmothers and aunts want them circumcised and ready for marriage. My man and I never wanted this for our girls, and now he is gone, we no longer have a protector. In one week's time there is a ceremony planned and we expect that we should be leaving before that special occasion. We have talked about this for a year and now we have decided to leave our village and our country, as nowhere in our country is safe. I had help from my brother-in-law to find someone to smuggle us out of the country and today we leave to go shopping into town, but we will not return, although everything will look like we are returning soon. We never wanted to leave, this after all is home with all its good and bad memories, its joys and its sorrows and now because we object to FGM we are leaving to join my cousin overseas. Guard every footstep we make and protect us we pray, merciful God.

### **4. THIS WAS ALWAYS HOME**

This is where we have lived since I was married, I remember what I was doing when my parents got killed by a car bomb, when my husband and my five children sat and cried after the funeral, as we spoke lovingly of the special memories that we had of Mama and Papa. All our five children were born in this house, where we also mourned the loss of my husband and two sons in the civil war. Civil war, Dear God, can any war be civil?

Our village has been bombed and now it no longer safe to live anymore in the cellar, where we have existed for a long time, coming out occasionally to find food. Everything around us seems to be rubble and houses don't really exist anymore. So with a heavy heart, I must leave with my three remaining children to get away from my home and my country, as nowhere else is safe in the country. Dear God, keep us safe and help our guide as he takes us out tonight. Where we find ourselves, may we be welcomed.



## **5. I HAVE LOST ENOUGH!**

Hear my cry Merciful god. As a mother I have lost enough. First it was my man who simply lost his life defending our home, and then it was my two boys who intervened to stop the soldiers from raping their mother and two sisters. The two other boys were too young to understand what was happening, but now they talk of fighting with the same men who killed their brothers and father. We never explained things to them, as they are still too young. Now the local militia wants to recruit children as the adults are deserting or being killed.

Now, I am leaving with my children, I have given enough as a mother and as a wife, I want no more of my children to die fighting for a cause that they do not even understand and for people for whom their sacrifice does not matter. Fighting is everywhere, so my brother will lead us out of the country and then hand us over to someone at the border. Guide our steps, Merciful God and may I not be condemned as being selfish.

## **6. MY DECISION**

I liked school very much and looked forward to be educated and make something of myself and recently my father told me to concentrate on my duties at home because in two years' time the elderly widower ten houses away has paid for me to be his wife. My family is poor, there are four of us and my father plants his garden but there is little money that comes in, so that money would be very helpful. I talked to my mother, my aunts, my grandmother and my grandfather and finally my teacher. My teacher told my father that I could do quite well and help the whole family to get out of poverty and my grandmother spoke sternly with him, but dad has already planned what he will do with the money. I want to make something of my life and having children at sixteen for a 50 year old man is not my idea of a future. I have been planning for a year and on the week-end, I leave with a girlfriend who is in a similar situation, We love our families, but their decisions are not right, help us to gain understanding from our families and guide us so that we can reward them in the future, Merciful God.

## **7. FEUDING CLANS**

It is hard Merciful God to explain certain things to officials, most of whom I fear because of my experiences at home. I am a refugee because of something that went wrong between two families, as a result I had to flee to a place of safety, because the threat of revenge certainly meant that I would be raped and killed. The family planning the revenge are powerful, so it would make no sense going to the authorities as our enemies are part of that hierarchy. Can I explain a blood feud to people who do not understand such feuds, and see them as barbaric fantasies? Why Europe? The country next door is closed because of the tentacles of the powerful in my country, so I go with my well paid traffickers until they say it is safe. So here am I, afraid, unhappy and hoping Merciful God for someone to understand my context.

## **8. POLITICAL PERSECUTION**

It seems that in Europe Merciful God politicians retire peacefully to their homes and apartments, not having to pay with their lives for past misdeeds, whether real or imagined. This is not so in my country, as my family has had to flee because of our links to the previous regime. I was never a politician, my views were never sought on anything but we were warned that like others of the previous regime who have disappeared, we would soon be a part of that history. So with very little possessions we had to go in different directions so that some will survive. These things do not make headlines in the West, so who am I to complain about a 'friendly government' that does business with the West, especially as the documents that I now have changed my name for my own protection. Help me to be truthful and honest about my situation Merciful God and give wisdom and understanding to my questioners.

## **9. A QUESTION OF HONOUR**

Merciful God, I am escaping from my family and I cannot explain what has really happened. I was seen speaking to an old classmate and this was interpreted by those who reported this to my family as a secret meeting. I did not realise how serious things were until my favourite younger brother came to tell me that I must get away quickly as tonight my uncle, my elder brother and father would take me away to kill me. I thought he must be joking until he took out an envelope with all of his savings to help me on my journey. Lord, I have heard of how these things have happened to others but never thought it would happen to me. I did nothing wrong but I have been judged, condemned and sentenced. My brother will help me to the border and after that I am on my own, so Merciful God I fall on my knees seeking your protection and asking for guidance.

## **10. MY AUNTY**

She seemed so kind and nice and generous, my aunty. She brought such nice gifts for the family and asked about my studies. She checked my books and my exam results and knowing of the poverty of my family, she offered a scholarship to Europe. Of course my parents jumped at the idea, because if I made it to Europe and became as wealthy as Aunty, then we would never be poor again. Of course I was also delighted. It did not seem strange that we had to go to a neighbouring country to get a passport, as Aunty said it was easier to get papers for me there. I travelled through various countries with other girls, until finally we get to Europe, as students. Then, Aunty stops being nice and makes it clear that before we see the inside of a classroom she needs to be repaid through prostitution. Suddenly, nice aunty has turned into unreasonable Nasty aunty and Merciful God my world has suddenly shattered. Help me to get out of this mess, Merciful God.

## THE PERILS OF THE JOURNEY





### **1. PROTECT ME LORD**

Please God, protect me from the vultures of the night. When I close my eyes let me wake up whole in the morning, free from harm, as some of the cries of my sisters in the night tell me there are dangers to women in this camp at night. I wish to finish my journey and only you can take me to my journey's end.

### **2. THE PEOPLE AROUND ME**

Lord, I put my trust in you, as I do not know anyone in this group I can trust. I have seen things go missing, people have been robbed, violence flares up too easily in this place. Perhaps, our nerves are frayed, as we fear discovery, so sometimes we sleep in the day and travel at nights but when we seem very tired we sleep some nights, but we lack trust in each other as we each have our own traumas. So I put my trust in you and hope that that I can survive this group.





### **3. A NEW REALITY**

I was told that we would find work in a nearby country, but we cannot enter our leader says as there are border- guards everywhere. Now I am totally lost and have no idea how I will ever return home.

We seem to have been travelling for a long time and obtaining food and water is a problem and now the women have been told that food and water will be given in return for sexual favours. This was not part of our agreement when my husband and I spoke to our leader. He seemed so helpful and so thoughtful, but now he seems so cruel. He even suggests that those who are not happy with his leadership can return! Impossible, when we have no idea where we are and no idea how we got here. Merciful God, it is now three days since the ultimatum from the leader and I have not given in to my desire for food and drink, help me to be strong and maintain my purity.

### **4. THE ULTIMATUM**

Dear God, I think of all the various ways in which I have condemned other women who have done what I have just done. I was hungry, I was thirsty and to quench my thirst and fill my stomach I had to have sex with my group leader, who treated me like I was a piece of wood, no tenderness but I just fulfilled a need. I feel dirty, unclean and because he made it clear that this will be the regular payment for all future food and drink. Perhaps, my life is not worth living. But Merciful God, I hope that I can live so that my family can have a better life, that I can have a job, so that my daughter and son can choose a different path in life.

## **5. MAKING MATURE JUDGEMENTS**

When I joined the group, I thought that some women were cruel to themselves and their children to take their children on such a journey, now I see how wrong I could have been. Some of them actually had children on the journey, as they became pregnant because of the regime of using sex for various favours. The choice was to live or die and like me, they made the choice to live. Dear God, teach me not to make judgments about others without understanding their situations and help me not to get pregnant.

## **6. VIOLENCE**

Last night it was not about sexual favours for food, this was brutal, this was violence, this, was rape. I had fallen into a deep sleep and when I came around, I had a hand over my mouth and I was been carried away from the camp by men. One explained in the darkness that if I screamed, I would die, so my life was in my hands. How many there were I cannot remember, but whether three or four I passed out at some stage and awoke to find some of the women crying and calling my name. They said nothing as they all knew, having had similar experiences. One sister told me that the ones who are lucky are those travelling with husbands or boyfriends, yet husbands and boyfriends are known to have been killed. Merciful God I hope that I never have to explain my journey to my husband and children, but my prayer is that you would guard my life and give me a spirit of endurance.

## **7. FEAR**

We are always on the lookout for other groups of travellers, for soldiers and planes or vehicles because that can often mean discovery and jail or worse depending on the country in which we may be caught. Wherever our journey may take us God, you need to lead, so that we may never be discovered until our journey's end.

We depend on each other's sense of hearing and sight, not just on those designated to be look-outs. We do not use fires lest we be seen in the night and the food tastes more and more like something no one has ever cooked. Merciful God, protect my insides, because these people do not look after stragglers, so keep me from becoming ill on this journey, as some people seem to go missing when they are ill and we ask no questions because of fear of our leaders.

## **8. FALSE HOPES**

Yesterday we were elated as we saw a town in the distance or at least some of us saw it. My thoughts were, how do I look to present myself for a job? Then, will they have something warm to eat that I can have? But we were told that only selected leaders would go to get food without attracting too much attention. We could be in danger if people realised there was a group of people hiding in the desert and we did not want anyone to report what direction we took in leaving the village. There was little food and drink that could be obtained without attracting too much attention. At least our hopes for change were raised for a few hours and dashed a few hours later. God the Merciful, may my hope in you never bring disappointment.

## **9. KIDNAPPED**

Rescue me Merciful God, as we have now been taken by another group of men. We have been deserted by our leaders when they realised that the group was heavily armed. It has been an ordeal because they want a ransom from our families back home, before we are released. I explain that we have no phones in our home, my family is poor, we have no laptops or internet and nobody has a job. When they ask where I am from, they realise that my country is poor, they allow me to travel to another town where perhaps I can join a group to go on my way. Some were not as fortunate, as these men took their lives. So despite my humiliations, I am safer than before, although I do not know where to go. Please, Merciful God, help me to find my way to a place where I can help my family, who has not heard from me in an entire year.

## **10. PERHAPS ANOTHER WEEK**

And my heartfelt cry is 'How Long O Lord?' , , I have been beaten, starved, raped and I am so tired physically and emotionally and now what was a journey of a few weeks feels like a lifetime of travelling. Today, despite the promises of another week of travelling from the leader, I do not feel I can cope with another week. I have lost so much weight in these last few months and all my savings are gone, most of it stolen by my rapists. Merciful God, give me the strength to endure every day of another week and protect me from becoming pregnant and getting AIDS.

### **11. NO ONE TOLD ME**

There was no preparation for this trip: no one could have foreseen the struggles and other difficulties along the way. How can I explain to my children that I have been a sex-slave in the last year and I have been sold to different groups until I finally escaped? The money that I promised to send home has not materialised and I have not been able to contact home, as I was robbed very early on of my only means of communications, my mobile.

There is no else to blame, no one else responsible for my predicament. My tears are my companions on this journey and yet I must go on for the sake of my children. Dear God, help me to make the right decisions in the next few days as I am still in danger and I have no idea where I am.

### **12. PREGNANT**

I cannot tell my children that they are going to have a brother or a sister. How do I explain that I do not know who the father is? What sort of woman will my deceased husband's parents think I have become? It could be any of six men in this g niemaroup and I cannot ask anyone about paternity. Dear God, what am I going to do?

### **13. WHERE AM I LORD?**

It was only to a neighbouring country, whose economy was much better than ours, that we thought we were going to, at least that gave us our bearings to get back home and we had heard that some of our countrywomen work there and send money back home. Now we are no longer in our region, we are bound for Europe and I do not speak any other language but my own? Now each region that we pass, each border that we cross, tell me that I am hopelessly lost. Now I do not know exactly where I am going and when I will get there. Merciful God, protect me and take me to a safe place.

### **14. LOSING SOME OF MY HUMANITY**

Merciful God, help me to recover some of my humanity, so that I can feel whole again. I travelled with friends, both male and female, and when they go missing, I do not try to find them, as I want to survive and I have learnt that asking too many questions can mean trouble for the questioner. Yesterday one of my friends was found dead with stab-wounds and I felt nothing that I can describe as grief, I just wanted the whole incident to be sorted out as soon as possible so we could move on. I know I am afraid, but help me to recover some sense of balance in my life, to think of others. I knew her children, her extended family and I know how her death will affect them all, yet I pretended it was business as usual. I know I am afraid, but Merciful God, help me to show empathy.

### **15. A PROSTITUTE**

Is this what I am now, having been raped by many men on this journey? I needed to survive, so all relationships were about getting food and drink to survive the journey. God you are my judge, forgive me, as I wanted above all to live to help my children. However, with every relationship and every rape, I feel that I am descending a ladder that I could never climb up again. Lord, lift me up and cleanse me, I pray.



## **16. THE SEA**

Today there is one more major obstacle to overcome Merciful God. We have to get on a boat to cross the sea. I have never been on a boat and I cannot swim and I am troubled at the prospect of getting into a boat that does not look safe Yet, the prospect of being left behind cannot be contemplated, so I have to deal with my fears in the same determined manner with which I fought my various demons to get to this point. I do not know what will await me on the other shore and what will happen on the waters, but protect me Merciful God. You have not brought me this far to lose my life, so continue guiding me and help me to overcome my fear of the sea.

## **17. ON THE SEA**

Lord, this is a necessary journey, but we seem to have no life-jackets and the boat already has a lot of water in it. We are drifting across the water at the mercy of the sea, because the captain has gone back to shore on another boat. There is general panic and I pray that we will survive this journey, as there is no one guiding this boat. Help seems to be coming from a large boat in the distance but we are taking in lots of water and I pray that we can be rescued in time. Lord, you have protected us so far; do not desert us in this time of need.

### **18. MISSING**

In the rush to get to the boats, although we held hands with each other, we parted and now son is with me. There was no way of going back, unless we wanted to be crushed underfoot. Where is my daughter and my other son, which of the other boats have they got on? Did they manage to get on any boat? These are the fearful questions I face Merciful God, let me not be disappointed and sorrowful and give me hope that I would see my children again.

### **19. BAD NEWS?**

When we were rescued, we heard that another boat had sunk and there were no survivors. So the pain of not knowing continues, and my mind starts playing tricks on me. My children must have been on that boat? How many other boats were there? Was there really only one? Are you sure that there were other boats? God who keeps and protects, I cannot cope with these questions. Merciful God, lift me out of this despair, give me hope and let my children be safe.

### **20. RELIEF**

I awoke to sounds of crying, pleading voices to wake up. I open my eyes, perhaps I am in Paradise as all my children are here with me with tears in their eyes. I must have fainted with sorrow and exhaustion, because this is real as they hug me and we cry tears of joy together. I will not forget your goodness to me Merciful God, as long as I live. Praise to the God who protects and saves.

MY DESTINATION?



## **1. PAPERS PLEASE**

Since I have never had to leave my village and nearby town to go anywhere, I never needed documents. When my husband was alive he dealt with the bank as he had a job and therefore some form of identity, so imagine my surprise to be asked for a passport or Identity Card. Lord, help these officials to believe my story, as over the months I have worried so much about what I am and who I am, because of my ordeals on this journey. I simply want to help my family and I cannot understand the differences about proper asylum seekers and economic migrants. Please help, merciful God.

## **2. WHERE CAN I BE SAFE?**

I was gang-raped in my own country and suffered the same fate in two other European countries, so Merciful God, where can I be safe from men who act like wolves as they seek to devour me! Very few people know my story God of Mercies, as I am so ashamed of my life. And now, despite my fears, I have been placed in a hostel where my room is surrounded by men. Where Merciful God, have you been in all my trials and difficulties? I cry to you constantly, please protect me and give me a place of safety.



### **3. CAN I REALLY GO BACK?**

Merciful Lord, Help me to put things right with my family by fulfilling my first aim to provide for them. I do not think I will see them again as there is too much that has happened that I cannot explain to my extended family, my husband and my children. How do I explain not taking my life after being raped? How do I explain not just having one but two children born on my journey and not knowing any of the fathers because of being raped many times? Children in my community were seen as a blessing, so it was hard for me to get rid of them. I know how I would be treated and how these new children of rape would be treated, as they would regard me as a prostitute. Whatever my future holds merciful God; help me to provide for all my children.

### **4. DESPAIR**

Today Merciful God, I have been told that my Dad was caught and one brother was caught. I have to appear cheerful to an official in half an hour but I am not really thinking of that interview as I think of the loving father and brother who certainly would not be allowed to live once they are tortured. My head, merciful God is full of questions, Where is my mother, how can she survive without my father? They were together, so how did she escape? What of my other brothers and sisters, where are they and are they safe? I have to try and cope with these questions in my own way as my interview is important and I cannot explain all these issues which are emotional. Help me Merciful God to focus on the questions asked and afterwards, give release to my sorrow for today I have lost two precious family members.

## **5. NO WAR IN YOUR COUNTRY!**

Merciful God, how can these officials make that claim? I am trying to understand why that is being claimed because I have heard people say that they want to wage a 'war against poverty.' In my country poverty has been waging a war against many families for a long time, so who defines what is war, when poverty seems to claim so many casualties? Take a look at our burial-grounds and our hospitals, and then we can put a number to some of the victims who are affected daily. a

## **6. NOT MY FIRST CHOICE**

Merciful God, my first choice was never the West. It was to go to a neighbouring country, a place of safety. I do not know people in the West and over the border we have a similar language, but they see us as trouble, so they started their own persecution of my community in their country, so we took flight. Some places are not safe, because of traditional distrust and as a woman some societies see an unaccompanied woman as a potential rape victim, so I have ended up here, a place where I do not understand the languages and customs, simply seeking safety. Can anyone understand that Merciful God, that this business of being an economic migrant was not my driving force to get here, I just wanted to be safe from harm!



## **7. ONE MORE STEP IS NEEDED**

We are going to be welcomed in Europe as our situation has been recognised world-wide. Merciful God, what a welcome?! After the bombings which have almost left us deaf for months, we set off with our guide who has been handsomely paid to get us to Europe. My children are nervous but excited with this new adventure, as they see it, yet I view this trip with some trepidation as border after border seems to be closed. We never asked for a war, Merciful God, yet so many governments are there helping us to fight against countless enemies. Our guide is cheerful and keeps telling us that we need to take one more step to freedom but I am beginning to waver. Every night I tend to the blistered feet of my own children and get angry with my husband for dying in this stupid war. Give us strength as we take a further step and may the feet of my children be strong enough to take the one more step that is needed.

## **8. WHEN THERE IS PEACE**

Merciful God, when there is peace, we wish to return home to our olive field, to our lands, where the children were born and reclaim our inheritance. We wish to rebuild our homeland,. my children see this place as nice but not home and they do not like to be seen and called refugees/asylum seekers. I have tried to shelter them from the political fallout over coming to Europe and the news about the popularity of those parties who do not want them here, but I cannot. Merciful God, help them to take advantage of the educational opportunities that are here, but never let us lose our focus on where home really lies and our constant prayer is that peace will come.

### **9. IS IT REALLY OUR RELIGION?**

Merciful God, there is a stereo-type of women of my religion that seems to dominate the Western media, as weak-willed and submissive and always likely to be veiled. Some even say we do not have opinions of our own and worse, we cannot express these opinions in the presence of men. I am angry at these portrayals, as I had my own business and was never known to without an opinion, as were many other women that I knew. Please help us to be understood Merciful God, and give us the ability to counteract these false images without our arguments or discussions being seen as religious. Help others to realise Merciful God, that like women everywhere we can be different and have similar hopes, ambitions and dreams for ourselves and our families.

### **10. THE STUMBLING-BLOCKS**

Merciful God, my problems as a woman never ended when I got here to this country. No I was not raped it has been suggested, because there is a rumour that people with a child or children get better treatment, so we try our best to get a child or perhaps two children before we get here. I am both sad and angry, as we are treated as if women of my country have no sense of morality or ethics. I come from a community where it is a most serious situation to have a child out of wedlock and where chastity is prized and young women would not be married if they were not virgins. Dear God, help officials to understand that we are not all prostitutes and that we should be dealt with as individuals and shown some respect.

## **11. THE TEARS FLOW**

Twenty months after leaving my family, I speak to my husband and my children for the first time and most of that time is spent crying as I cannot say when I am coming back and cannot fully explain all that I have gone through. No one asks about money that was to be sent, they know that if I had money, I would send, but they are just happy that I am safe. I know they are suffering but they know that I love them and that I will try my best to come through for them, but Merciful God, I now know that I could never return to bring a stain on the character of my husband and children, so that my children and husband could be ridiculed by others and I lose my life because of what I have done to the respectability of my extended family. Merciful God, stem my tears of sorrow, because I now have other children that also need me to be courageous.

## **12. MY DIFFICULTIES**

Merciful God, the problems increase at the same rate as my headaches increase in this new land. I need to speak the language and although I am willing to work, but there are rules about who should work or who cannot. Who knew anything about EU rules for employment when I was leaving home? To say that I should have checked the information before I left suggest that I have access to computers in a village where we have no electricity and that I had a clear idea that I was coming to Europe, but I cannot seem to get through to my interviewers. Merciful God, help me to explain myself properly and to get them to understand as my interpreter does not seem to be of any use.

### **13. MY DIFFICULT INTERPRETER**

Merciful God, my interpreter is now my problem, as we are having three conversations in the interview room. She seems to filter what I am saying to the authorities, and sometimes she tells me that I cannot say what I am saying because it is a criticism of my country and those in power. She seems to be linked to the ruling group at home, as her name suggests such a connection. She is not really helping as she believes that I should go back and face those who forced me to run away. I do not understand what she is telling her colleagues, but she is not interpreting my words, so I have a serious problem that I cannot explain to the interviewers. Merciful God, I do not know how to deal with this, so I cry to you for help.

### **14. THE END OF MY JOURNEY**

I had to be checked medically and today I got the results. Merciful God, this is not what I ever wanted for my life, but the tests show that I now have AIDS. I never realised that my rapists would not just humiliate me but to make it impossible to go home again, as there are limited facilities for dealing with these problems in my country and these can only be accessed by the wealthy. Perhaps this is for the best, as I could never explain what I went through, nor pass this on to my husband. so I will take the offer of remaining. Merciful God, I cannot stop crying as I see the faces of my husband and children in my dreams and in my waking moments. Dear God, this feels like a life-sentence, but help me to make a new life in which I can fulfil my initial aim of helping my family financially.

## **15. THE FIRST JOB**

I am excited about my first job in this new land. I am not supposed to be working, but I know that my family desperately needs money. My job is to clean the house, make up beds and do the washing up a few hours every day except for weekends. If everything goes well, I can have a place to stay at this family and take more responsibility for cooking and looking after the children. They understand about the needs of my family and my problem with being paperless and needing to send money home and will help me to send money. Merciful God, it is good to find such a kind family. It is now three months, and my bosses are forever behind in their payments and my complaints are met with threatening comments about reporting me to the authorities and being thrown out of the country. Lord I am confused, please help and guide me in my confusion.

## **16. WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ME?**

I have been experiencing some difficulties as I have been travelling, especially after the last rape and now that I have been examined a second time, I know that I cannot return home as I have a fistula. Merciful God, it has been explained to me that the rough treatment of the men who raped me resulted in this tear and that surgery may not make me whole again. In fact, it has been explained that I may need more than one operation. Merciful God, give wisdom to the surgeons and help my family to understand my unexplained absence.

#### **17. SOMETHING TO MAKE ME HAPPY**

Merciful God, it is a small thing, but today my family received the first money I sent them and they were overjoyed, as my children can go back to school and my husband can justify to his family my departure. It was good to hear them laugh and to hear my children dream of what they will do with the monthly money that I will send. I know that money will not replace my presence in their lives but at least it is a happy distraction. Merciful God, help me to increase their joy and Help me to overcome my sorrow.

#### **18. WHAT OF THE FUTURE?**

Merciful God, hear my concerns, it is now a year and there is talk of deportations for some of us because we are not a country at war. This is a problem for me as it does not make international news when there are some family or clan fights, but the threat of death to a family is as real as war. Returning us to the regime that wants our death seems to be insane, but that is what may well happen! How will this help me, as I have already lost a brother and father and have no idea where the rest of the family is hiding or whether they have been captured? Since the government is a friend of the West, officials in the West overlook their failings, so perhaps my troubles are still to come. I may just have to keep running again and find some other country that may be safe. Merciful Lord, Protect and Guide my steps and take me to a place of safety.



#### **49. I FEAR MY COMPANIONS IN THIS CAMP**

Merciful Lord, I have been approached by some of the men in our camp for sex. Some of my former travelling companions who raped me have been spreading rumours of my sexual adventures while travelling, so they all believe I am readily available. The women of the camp have been told so I am avoided by many of my own sex in a camp where I first felt supported. The problem that I have is that the men are getting aggressive in their demands. Protect me Merciful God, as these men are becoming wolves away from their own wives and girlfriends.

#### **50. AND NOW DISCRIMINATION**

We are called names now that there are two classes of Refugees, those who are wanted and those who are not. It is the official policy we are told and there is open discrimination among us, as some believe that we are the reason they are not yet processed and housed and we are told to go back home as we are not wanted, Refugees have turned against refugees and as a woman I feel so vulnerable because experience has taught me that in any conflict, women are the first casualty. Protect us Merciful God from each other and restore a sense of unity among us.



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