

November 17, 2021

To Whom it may concern:

My full name as it appears in the documents from my homeland is **ዛይድ ንጉሰ ካሕሳይ**. Transliterated my name reads, Zaid Negusse Kahsai.

In the temporary visa document issued by Israel my full name appears as Zaid Kahsai.

My date of birth on the Ethiopic calendar [REDACTED] On the Western calendar that date is [REDACTED]

I am a Catholic Christian.

The place of my birth is War`Aatele, in the region called Irob, which is my nationality. Irob lies directly between Eritrea and Ethiopia. At the time of my birth Irob was a county of Tigray State, in Ethiopia. But Irob is a land long claimed by both the Eritrean and the Ethiopian governments. After the war there of 1998-2002 it was a militarized zone, until only a couple years ago. But since November 2020 it has once again become a war zone, and is still a disputed territory of Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Currently I reside, on temporary visa, in Israel, in the city Ramat Hasharon at [REDACTED]

My last place of (temporary) residence in Irob was in the city of Adi-Grat, in Tigray State.

Before I entered Israel, against my will, brought by human traffickers to the border and given no choice but to cross it, I passed through Sudan and Egypt. How did it come to that?

It was the end of a long ordeal that began August 20, 1995, when, at age 13, I was given in marriage by arrangement to the father of my children. From that time on my life became complicated. I was underage, too immature to marry, and my husband, too, was underage, seventeen years old. Both of us were incapable of establishing an harmonious relationship as husband and wife.

As a result, we quarreled day and night, until we began to fight. He abused me many times physically, violently. It was during this early part of my ordeals that my first daughter, Hiwot, was born on May 15, 1989 (Ethiopic calendar). My joy was overshadowed by the little child's very serious health condition, a congenital malformation of her colo-rectal tract. That strained further the already violent relationship with my husband, because in our society such a disease has a bad

meaning. It is seen as a curse. And my husband and his family said that Hiwot was a curse to them. His parents considered me especially as a curse also, and they neglected me, disowned me, stopping their help immediately after I gave birth to my poor daughter. As a consequence, I – abandoned – was forced to look after my daughter solely on my own, and I experienced such a bad life which I can hardly explain in words. Even separated, my husband continued to abuse me verbally, mentally, and physically. It came to the point that I was living in a life-threatening situation. In such a condition and circumstances my husband abused me again sexually and I conceived and gave birth to my second daughter, Rodas. Again, the moment of joy turned to sorrow, when my husband showed himself even more vicious, and I realized that my life had spun completely out of control.

Faced with what seemed a desperate situation and no longer having the strength to bear it, I placed my daughters in the care of family and in the summer of 2009 I fled from my homeland with the hope that somehow – only God knew how – I might return to my daughters and in the meantime provide some means, however small, for their care.

I passed into Sudan and later, at the unforgiving mercy of human traffickers, into Egypt.

On July 30, 2009 I crossed the border from Ethiopia into Sudan at Hamdait and went directly to the Shagarab UNHCR Refugee Camp. After only ten days, at approximately 7:00 on the evening of August 10, I was suddenly kidnapped by human traffickers who took me forcibly to Sinai, Egypt, loaded in Toyota vehicles with other kidnapped refugees. With them I suffered what seemed to be a hell for two months: surviving on barely enough food or water, in unsanitary conditions throughout: until my family and relatives paid the kidnappers 3,000 U.S. dollars. On October 30, 2009 the traffickers, now paid, released me at the border, giving me no choice but to sneak into Israel. Since then I am living in Israel.

At arrival in Israel I was placed in Sahronim Prison for eight months. At that time Israel was not accepting Ethiopian refugees and even deported many Ethiopian refugees to Ethiopia. The authorities suspected me of being Ethiopian, and when I told them I am Irob and was subject to Eritrean law because of the border dispute and the history of my family, they did not believe me. In this dilemma I languished seven months, until finally, in protest and to convince the authorities of my origins, I went on a hunger strike for two weeks. Afterward, the prison authorities released me on condition, given by the Israeli immigration, to present a photo of my mother, to be taken in Senafe City, under Eritrean administration. It was then that I met an Eritrean in Israel, whom I asked to bring the evidence, which he did.

Unfortunately, the same Eritrean also brought me a lot of trouble. He wanted to take me as his wife, but since I was already married I cannot, and by no means wish to enter again into a relationship, since I fear it too much.

Now I am afraid that the same Eritrean will rape me, because he continues to follow me when I leave my apartment, nagging and begging me to marry him, and to give in to his sexual advances. It has come to the point where now I am afraid for my life. I do not know how long this man will wait until he becomes angry, and injure or perhaps even kill me.

I am also afraid that someone will steal my work earnings from the small room where I sleep. I mean, the members of the family or their friends in the place where I work and live. For that reason I take the money when I leave the house, and then I am afraid I might lose it or be robbed on the street.

It has happened that at a former employer's household they took a month's wages from me when I told them I had to leave. In another home I injured my hand seriously, cutting it on a bottle, and had to rest it for two weeks, to heal. That employer also took my wages and fired me. A third family employer fired me and also took my wages of two months.

All these experiences make me even more afraid to lose the little wages I earn. I am afraid also that if some man or group of men find out that I carry money about, they will rape and beat me when they steal my wages, leaving me to die.

But I still hope that the UNHCR will declare me a refugee. Why? Because, on account of the ongoing war, I cannot possibly return to my homeland, Irob, without fear of death or serious injury. (And if the authorities release me into Sinai, I will surely fall into the clutches of the human traffickers again.) Already so many of my family in Irob have died since the war began last November, or fled the dangers of battle and pillage, or hide there in constant fear. But I also hold out hope, because my daughter Hiwot now lives in Columbus, Ohio, in the USA. She went there April 22, 2021 – even amidst world-wide lockdown – sponsored by one of her uncles, to obtain life-saving surgery. She has recovered from multiple surgeries and her health is restored. There are more members of our extended family who will sponsor my resettlement in the U.S. and I am already in communication with charitable organizations ready to assist.

I ask the UNHCR please to take all the above into consideration, and grant to me the status of refugee, so I can finally be reunited with family.

Please, communicate with me.

Zaid Negusse Kahsai

