

June 2019

Humanitarian Protection for Ethiopian Torture Victims

In 2010, a group of 44 teenage girls from Ethiopia were kidnapped from their homes. After being kidnapped, the girls were taken to Sudan, where they were held for an unknown period between a few weeks to a few months. There they endured torture, including sexual violence. After sometime, they were sold to human traffickers who took them to the Sinai Peninsula, where a violent human trafficking operation had been active for years. In Sinai, the girls were moved between torture camps, where they were forced to call their families and beg for ransom money whilst they were being tortured.

The group finally entered Israel in 2012, where all of the girls were placed in Saharonim Prison. This was a major violation of governmental policy, as most of the girls were still under 18. Furthermore, the Police Task Force on Human Trafficking recognized the group as victims of human trafficking. Under proper procedure, victims of human trafficking are to be released from detention and placed in residential rehabilitation shelters. However because the shelter is for adults, and these girls were minors, the state did not know what to do with them and as a result left them in immigration detention center for over a year. Many of the women still suffer from significant physical and mental health issues stemming directly from the torture they endured. They still have no health insurance or welfare support in Israel, so managing their symptoms is challenging.

After receiving poor legal advice, all of the women submitted asylum applications. Recently, their asylum applications have begun to be checked and rejected, because the women, who were kidnapped from their home country and did not flee due to persecution, are not refugees under the refugee convention. Despite having been kidnapped from their country of origin, the women still fear returning to Ethiopia due to the stigma associated with being raped.

The Hotline would like to request that the Ministry of Interior provide special humanitarian status for this group of young women. This is not an official procedure, however the case warrants special consideration based on the extreme humanitarian situation. The negligent treatment by the state authorities upon the girls' entrance to Israel compounded the damage to the victims' mental and physical health, which were already weak after the trauma of being kidnapped, tortured and trafficked to Israel. The state needs to be held accountable for its negligence in this case.