

My Story

Aasiya Amin

Aasiya Amin is not her real name. Aasiya is an asylum seeker who is currently in detention at Villawood Detention Centre. She has shared her story with us. Details of Aasiya's story and personal history have been changed to protect her privacy and identity.

My name is Aasiya Amin, I am 18 years old, and I am an asylum seeker from Somalia. This is my story.

Before I fled Somalia, there had been a lot of fighting between the Ethiopian troops and the militia. It was about six years ago when things got really bad for me and my family. In my city, there was a fight almost every day. It became too dangerous for us to stay, especially since we were so young — I was only 12 at the time. I was living with my aunt and I travelled with her to Ethiopia to escape the war. When we arrived, we were placed in a UNHCR refugee camp. Life in the refugee camp was very difficult. We did not have any proper accommodation and it was very difficult to get enough food.

Months later, we discovered that my father had been killed in the war in Somalia. We saved enough money to travel back to Somalia and we went back. My aunt didn't tell me why we went back, but I believe it was because she didn't want to take responsibility for me anymore. She returned me to my grandmother, who was at the time living with my grandfather in Somalia. When I returned, it was still very dangerous for me. There was a lot of fighting going on between the militia, the Somalian government and African union troops.

We stayed for a while, but it became too dangerous and we had to flee to a rural area, to escape the violence. It was very difficult to survive in this area: there was no electricity, no safe drinking water, and barely any food. On many occasions, I would not have any food to eat for days. My family built a stick house to live in. When it rained, our house would flood. We had no choice but to stay.

Still, after a while, the militia took control of the area we were living in. One day my grandmother was approached at home by men from the militia. They told her that they needed to recruit young men and women to work with them. They needed the young men to fight, and the young women to cook, clean and help look after the injured militia fighters. My grandmother refused to give any of us to them. She told them that my brothers were too young, and that they could not take her only granddaughter. They told my grandmother that she did

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not have a choice; it was not an offer. They told her that if we didn’t volunteer ourselves, we would be taken by force. I was at home when this conversation took place.

That night, my house was raided by men who were armed and had their faces covered. My grandmother and brothers were powerless and couldn’t prevent me from being taken. My grandmother was screaming and crying as they took me away. I was blindfolded and taken to a car, but I could hear there were other girls in the car with me. The next morning when my blindfold was removed, I saw armed men everywhere. I could see that we were in a camp site, and I knew that I had been taken by the militia. I was around 14 years old at this time.

All of the girls who were taken were given a briefing by the militia men. We were told that we would be given training and that our job would be to help the militia by looking after the wounded soldiers who had been injured in the fight against the government. We were also told that we would not be able to communicate with our families again – we had no phones, no internet, we were cut off from the outside world. We were told we could not leave the camp site and that we would be guarded.

I was kept in the camp hospital and made to look after the militia fighters who had been injured in the fighting against the government. Many of the injuries I saw were horrific, and many of the patients were aggressive and disoriented. If patients died under my care, I would be punished. The punishment would often be to be taken outside in the middle of the night, doused in cold water and beaten with sticks. Other young boys who had been forced to join the militia, were made to do this to me, even though they seemed unhappy to do this. This happened around five or six times.

After we had been detained in the hospital for around six months, there were some very big battles between the militia and the African troops. Militia fighters came

with orders that everyone had to fight, including injured patients and guards. A few of us stayed back to look after the patients who had stayed. Whilst majority of the guards were out fighting, a small group of women and myself escaped from the camp in the middle of the night.

We went to the government-controlled area, hoping that they would provide us with some protection. When we approached the Somali government troops, they were screaming at us and shooting into the air. They told us that we weren’t allowed to approach them in the dark, because they couldn’t see who we were. We tried to tell them who we were and what had happened to us, but we were shot at again. We were made to lie on the ground in the dark, and we were told that we weren’t allowed to move. We remained like this all night, and when anyone moved even slightly, the government troops shot at us.

When the sun came up, we were allowed to stand. But because we were wearing clothes that had been issued by the militia, they thought we were part of them, and detained us in army detention. We kept trying to explain what happened to us, but they wouldn’t listen. When their supervisor arrived, he spoke to the other soldiers in front of us. He told them that we were to be beaten, to see if any of us would reveal information about the militia.

The soldiers then beat us all severely. We were beaten with the butts of their guns, hit and kicked. Some of the pregnant women who were with me started to bleed heavily because they were being hit and kicked in the stomach. I was very bruised and I was in a lot of pain. We were detained by the government troops until later that morning, and weren’t given any food or water during this time.

In the morning I I was taken to hospital. I couldn’t speak, but I was recognised by a distant relative, Hassan. Hassan approached the soldiers who were guarding me

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and asked them what was happening. He vouched for me and explained that I had been kidnapped by the militia. The soldiers told Hassan to bring my grandmother to the hospital to speak with them. My grandmother came to the hospital, and was crying when I saw her. She told the soldiers what had happened and how my family had been looking for me. The soldiers then allowed me to go home with my grandmother.

After I had been at home for a couple of days, my grandmother received a message from an unknown number, saying 'we know that your granddaughter has escaped, if you don't send her back to us, you will both be killed.' After this, we went into hiding. We stayed in our house and did not leave, not even to buy groceries. I remained in hiding like this for around a year.

After this time, however, my family members told me that the government had been reclaiming some land from the militia, and that it would be safe for me to go out again, because many militia members had been captured or killed. So I decided to leave home again to continue my education and managed to re-enrol in school. I attended school for a few months, but then one afternoon as my brother and I were driving home from school, we came across a man standing in the middle of the road. Out of nowhere, the man started shooting at the car. My brother was shot in the face, there was blood everywhere. I don't know whether it was me or him who was bleeding. I don't remember what happened next, but when I awoke I was in hospital. I later learned that my brother died from his injuries.

After this my grandmother realised she could no longer offer me protection, and that it was too dangerous for the rest of my family for me to stay with them. I knew that I could not live alone in Somalia, so we decided that I should flee the country.

We started to prepare for my departure. My uncle sold many pieces of jewellery that had been in the family so that they could afford to send me out of Somalia. My uncle also paid a friend to keep me in hiding for three months, and I did not leave the house except to get my passport.

I took a number of flights and finally ended up in Indonesia. I then travelled by boat to Christmas Island. While I was on the boat, I thought I was going to die. I felt sick and passed out. When I awoke I was on an Australian ship. I lost my passport on the boat trip over, so when I arrived at Christmas Island, I could not prove my age. I was 15 at the time, but my age was recorded as being 18. I was on Christmas Island for six weeks before being transferred to Nauru, where I stayed for two years.

Conditions were so bad in Nauru that I tried to escape. I attempted suicide by using a razor blade, and tried to hang myself with my bedding. I was transferred onshore in early 2015 because of my medical problems. Conditions were so bad in Nauru, that I would rather my dead body be taken to Nauru, as I cannot think of going back to that same place again.

I am not sure what my future holds, but I hope to get refugee status, and be released from detention.



Artwork by Alwy Fadhel