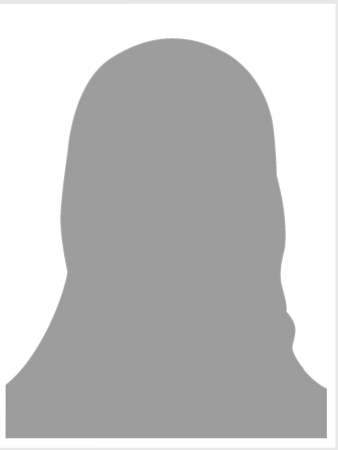


# Faiza



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Faiza was a lawyer in Sudan, supporting victims of the Genocide in Darfur. In 2007 the Sudanese Government targeted Faiza and her children and they were forced to leave their family and community and seek asylum in the UK. Faiza's name and image have been changed to protect her identity.



*'This my story: a mother with four children from Sudan. One day I decided to leave my country. It was a very hard decision, but there was no other way. I left my home, my friends, my people, I left all my belongings. There is a book on a table near my bed open to page 49 waiting for me.'*

Faiza was born in 1961 in Kosti, a small city in Sudan. The youngest of four children, she had a very happy childhood, with caring and supportive parents. They lived in a very close-knit community, where everyone loved and supported each other. It was a quiet and simple life. 'At night, there was no electricity, so the whole village would gather together and share stories. It made you feel happy all of the time.'

In 1981, Faiza moved to the capital of Sudan, Khartoum, to attend university, where she studied law. She continued to live in the city as a lawyer, where she married her husband and had four children. In 2003, the Sudanese Government began genocidal campaigns against black African farming communities in Darfur, a region in Western Sudan. Faiza lost many family members, including most of her mother's family, when whole villages were burnt to the ground and civilians murdered. Faiza started working with women who had been victims of sexual violence, whose villages had been burned and relatives killed. She wanted to help the women, so went back to university to research how rape was being used as a weapon in Darfur. Faiza had the respect and support of her family and community, who were all proud of her accomplishments.

When the international media began highlighting the Genocide in Darfur, the regime became more aggressive, silencing anyone who knew what was happening in an attempt to stop the international outcry. Lawyers and researchers were among those targeted. Faiza, who regularly travelled to the displaced persons camps in Darfur to help the women there, was targeted and harassed. She has painful memories of this time, of being threatened and physically abused. Every day when she left her house, she saw the security forces waiting for her. She was told she could not continue her research at the university. One day, members of a government militia came to Faiza's office. They showed photographs they had taken of Faiza's daughter with her friends and threatened to harm her. Faiza said 'I needed to protect my children – we made the hardest decision of my life and decided to leave the country.'

In 2007, Faiza and her four children fled their home in the night and boarded a flight to the UK using an old holiday visa. Fearing that if they travelled together it would raise suspicion, Faiza and her husband reluctantly decided that she had to make the journey with the children and he would follow after. It was four years until they would see him again. Faiza and her children travelled

with just a handbag, to avoid suspicion. They could not tell any of their family or friends they were leaving – something which was particularly painful for Faiza. ‘I left everything there. I left my house, I left my office, my clients, my friends, my relatives, the people I used to help. Everybody was asking “Where did she go, what happened?”’.

When they arrived in the UK, life was extremely difficult for Faiza and her children as they began the process of claiming asylum. They lived in Liverpool at first, then were sent to Bolton. They were constantly moved between different temporary accommodations and were not able to establish a new home. In one of the houses, they had no heating throughout winter. When she went to the housing officer, he said ‘you can’t complain, this is not your home’. Communication with her family in Sudan was very difficult. After having had the support of her husband and family in Sudan, Faiza spent four years raising her children alone.

‘I came to England with my children and nothing but the heart of a mother, full of fear. Everything here is different and cold. I miss the sun, the people and the streets. I lost my safety and security. I can’t go back because of the gloom which covers my country. The government suppresses and rapes the women and denies their rights, kills the opposition and jails every honourable person who stands up to them.’

It took two years for Faiza and her children to be granted asylum, despite support from her MP. During this time, she had to travel for hours every week to report to an officer. She says she felt like a criminal, as she could have been detained at any time without notice. ‘It was a very, very difficult time for me and my children. The process was so hard for someone like me, coming from a very quiet and peaceful life’.

Initially, Faiza was not permitted to find work whilst she sought asylum and she has struggled to find work since, due to the challenging language barrier. Despite this, Faiza has dedicated a huge amount of time to volunteering in her community. Before being granted asylum herself, Faiza volunteered to support other refugees arriving in the UK. She has since worked on many voluntary projects, including establishing and supporting community groups, campaigning against hate crime and raising awareness about FGM (female genital mutilation). In 2017 she was awarded an Inspire Women Award in recognition of her community work.

Faiza is still unable to return to Sudan for fear of being persecuted. In 2017, a friend of Faiza’s went to Sudan and took part in a peaceful demonstration. Despite having a UK passport, she was imprisoned for three months. The President of Sudan, Omar Al-Bashir, who was indicted by the International Criminal Court for Genocide in Darfur, still remains President today.

Faiza still feels she has not been able to fully establish a new home in the UK. The culture, climate and language are very different and she has had to adjust from living in a supportive, loving community at home in Sudan to a more solitary life. ‘I still feel I don’t belong here. This was not what I expected or what I planned for my family or my children. If I had the choice I would still live at home with my family. I would still live the same life I lived’. Faiza now lives in London, where she is continuing her volunteer work and supporting her children through school and university. One day, she hopes that she will be able to return home to Sudan.

Find out more...

The Genocide in Darfur: [hmd.org.uk/darfur](https://hmd.org.uk/darfur)

Life stories of those affected by genocide: [hmd.org.uk/lifestories](https://hmd.org.uk/lifestories)