

ABDUL AZIZ MUSTAFA



HOLOCAUST
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Abdul Aziz Mustafa is a member of the Zaghawa people, and grew up in Darfur. At the age of 13 his family life was destroyed by persecution by the Sudanese Government. Abdul Aziz escaped Sudan by being smuggled on a lorry in an arduous 22 day journey.



'Britain is now my second home. It is good to have a new life, but it was really tough to have no contact with my family for so long.'

I was born in 1991 and grew up in the town of Tina, in North Darfur, right next to the border with Chad. In 2003 I was 13 years old, living with my mum, dad, 11 year old brother, and extended family.

One day I returned from school, to the shop my dad owned. I found many people gathered around, including government soldiers in green uniforms. The soldiers had killed my father. I learned that they had killed him because we belonged to the Zaghawa tribe. The Government said Zaghawa people didn't belong in Darfur.

They killed many other people in the town. They stole people's possessions, like cows and sheep. They took women and children away. They killed the youngest children, under three years old. I saw the bodies of those young children and babies.

Government soldiers and Janjaweed militia continued to terrorise our town. After 18 months of persecution, our family decided to leave for a refugee camp at Fashir, more than 600 kilometres away. Life in the camp was hard. There was no school. Sometimes there wasn't enough food. Foreign aid agencies weren't allowed into the camp, so there wasn't enough support or healthcare. People continued to be killed by militia.

After two years in the camp I was 15. I decided that I wanted to leave the danger and poverty of the camp. My mum was worried, but she gave me some money. I escaped the camp. I went into the city of Fashir – the first time I had seen a city – and found a people smuggler. I was smuggled across Sudan in the back of an open lorry, along tough roads. After seven days we arrived in Port Sudan, on the north east coast. It was the first time I had seen the sea.

Five of us were put into a shipping container, and given some food and water for the journey. It was boiling hot and totally dark. We had to be silent. We didn't know where we were going, we had never been on a ship before and we were scared. The conditions were terrible – we only had bottles to use to go to the toilet. I cut my head open at one point, when the container jerked unexpectedly. After 11 days we were taken out of the container and put onto the back of a lorry. In the lorry there was a little light. We spent 10 days in the lorry.

After travelling in silence for 22 days, we were aware that the lorry was driving in England. We could hear the traffic around the lorry. Then the lorry stopped. We broke out of the lorry and found ourselves at a petrol station by a motorway. We were bewildered. We walked along the motorway and the police stopped us. They told us not to walk on the motorway, but said they couldn't help us.

We walked to the railway station. We were filthy after not washing for 22 days. We had no money. The station worker let us onto the train without a ticket. We arrived at Victoria Station in London and spoke to the police. A passerby who spoke Arabic heard us talking to the police, and stopped to help. He told us we needed to go to the Home Office in Croydon. He bought us a train ticket, water and a sandwich. It was an act of kindness from a stranger I will never forget.

We arrived at Croydon around 11pm. We slept rough next to the station as we had nowhere to go. At 7am we went to the Home Office building. I spent the day being interviewed about my story. Because I was only 15 they called for a social worker to arrange for me to be looked after. The other men from the lorry were interviewed and released. I was placed into foster care that night. I slept for two days because I was exhausted from my journey.

I was placed with a foster family from South Sudan, who helped me settle into a new culture. England was strange – I found the diversity of people in London new and exciting. I went to a special school where we learnt English and were taught about the UK. The authorities said I could stay in the UK until I was 18. In that time I had no contact with my family – I didn't know whether my mum was safe.

When I was 18 I had to apply to remain in the UK. I went to court where they tried to say I was not from Sudan, and not from the Zaghawa tribe. Eventually I was allowed to remain for another five years. Around that time my brother got in contact using Facebook. He had escaped Sudan and was living in Israel. He put me in touch with the rest of my family. I phoned my mum – she was so excited to hear from me. When I turned 18 it was time to leave my foster family. I was given a very small studio flat in south London. I felt vulnerable as the neighbours were intimidating and had many problems with alcohol and drugs.

Settling into life in the UK has been hard. I started drinking heavily with my friends when I was 16, which has had a bad effect on my health. Recently I was working as a waiter, but I had to give this up because my health got really bad.

Britain is now my second home. It is good to have a new life. Compared to Sudan, life here is easy. I am grateful for the opportunities I have. But it was really tough to have no contact with my family for so long.

Find out more... Genocide in Darfur: hmd.org.uk/darfur