

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FEATURE

AI index: ACT 30/037/2013

EMBARGO: Thursday 23 May 2013, 00:01Hs GMT

People on the Move: 'I cannot explain how terrible the situation was'

This is part of a special 'People on the Move' series, highlighting the human rights violations faced by migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers in every part of the world. These profiles are being published around the launch of Amnesty International's [Annual Report 2013](#).

Abubaker Ali Osman, a Somali engineer until recently living in Libya, never imagined he would become a refugee. But when violence broke out in the North African country in early 2011, he was forced to flee. He rented a car with his wife and six children and drove to Tunisia, where they lived in a refugee camp for a year.

The Osman family now live in Germany, from where Abubaker spoke to Amnesty International about the challenges facing refugees.

I'm from Somalia but I moved to Libya in 1985. I was working as an engineer and teacher in a university in central Libya. I was living there with my wife and six children, who are all born in Libya.

I was working, doing a normal job, living a normal life. Everything was good until February 2011 when the uprising erupted. The situation became very dangerous. I was living in the university campus with my family but Libyans started accusing people from Somalia and other countries of being al-Gaddafi mercenaries. Many people were killed because of these false accusations even though many were like me, normal workers.

I was living in the campus of the faculty and it was safe there but the danger was around me. The threat was there. Also we were living very close to military installations that NATO was bombing. That was terrifying the children and all of us.

When the crisis escalated, we started hearing the noise of bullets nearby, plus the shortage of food and the mobs started getting closer. I got scared for my children and we decided to leave in August 2011.

My older children wanted to stay and started asking, "Where will we go?" I faced the reality that I come from Somalia, with a very different reality so there was nowhere to go.

So we decided to move. Reaching the border with Tunisia was not easy. We had heard many stories of people who faced problems on the road and that some people had been killed. But there was no alternative.

We rented a car, took some clothes and fortunately reached the Libya-Tunisia border safely.

When we arrived at the border, the UN agencies took us to the Choucha refugee camp. We lived there for nearly a year.

The situation there was very difficult.

Thousands of people had left Libya for Tunisia. More than 3,000 people were staying in Choucha refugee camp. They had nowhere else to go.

The UN gave us three tents to live in as we were a large family. We had food.

In the refugee camp sometimes there were problems between people. Organization was a problem and sometimes there were fights. There were also many problems when the sandstorms came. There were also clashes between the local Tunisians and the refugees.

For my children it was all very difficult. They had never seen anything like that. They wanted to go back but I explained to them it was too dangerous. After two months, they adjusted.

Two months after arriving, I started volunteering as a translator in the camp and so did one of my children.

I cannot express in words how difficult the situation was for everybody.

While we were at the refugee camp, the [UN Refugee Agency] UNHCR started to conduct some interviews. Many countries offered to accept refugees although unfortunately the UK and France, who were leading the NATO bombardment, took hardly anybody! My file was fortunately accepted by the German government.

It was a long process and some people are still there waiting but fortunately our file was processed fast. We were lucky.

It's hard to explain how great it was to be in that terrible situation and be given that news.

On 2 September 2012 we were told that we were going to Germany the next day. We didn't sleep that night.

When we arrived in Germany we landed in Hanover. We finally slept safely for the first time in one year.

We are now in Berlin. My children are going to school and my wife and I are learning German.