

## **Testimony from Kidane Isaac, former prisoner in Eritrea who escaped**

He studied building construction at school and then at 18 went off to do his national conscription.

While he was working (under national conscription) as a military surveyor he was arbitrarily arrested with some friends. They were held for a month in a police station.

One night they broke the window and escaped. Now 'on the run' they realized they had to leave the country so they tried looking for smugglers who they could pay to get them over the border. They made arrangements but during the attempt they were caught.

This time they were taken to a much higher security prison somewhere in the jungle. Here he describes torture (beatings, being tied up in stress positions) and he was kept in a shipping container and routinely blindfolded. He said the heat was unbearable. The food was just two lumps of bread a day and they became very weak and malnourished. He also said that into the night he could hear the cries of other prisoners as they were tortured.

After over a year in this facility, he was transferred to a lower-security prison and forced to work in the fields. He said he was outraged by how unfair it all was and he had no idea he could be kept in such terrible conditions. Even though he knew he might be killed he decided to try and escape.

He and some friends made a run for it (from one of the fields they were working in) one night when the moon went behind a cloud and when the nearest guard was distracted accompanying someone for a toilet break. He said they were fired at but because it was so dark they managed to escape.

They walked at night until they reached the capital city, Asmara. They weren't able to contact their families or friends for fear they would also be arrested and tortured. They went into hiding for a month only coming out at night and hiding in the day.

Eventually they learned of a mass transport of conscripts being taken by bus to an army base very close to the Sudan border. The three of them sneaked onto the buses along with the thousands of new recruits.

Once at the military base, they ran away.

They walked for six nights across the Sahara to the Sudan border but they got separated when they came across some soldiers. Kidane says he saw people who had died of dehydration on the journey. They were very weak.

He eventually made it into Sudan where they paid some nomads to give them water, directions and transport. From there they went to UNHCR.

Kidane now lives in Tel-Aviv.