



“A Long Journey Home”

The Story of the Voluntary Return of a Victim of Child Trafficking Assisted by IOM

Mariam (fictitious name) is a minor and a victim of trafficking. She was sold in her country and brought to work in Egypt. Thanks to the joint effort of the Government of Egypt and the Government of her country, supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Mariam was helped to return home, as per her desire. Due to her story of trafficking and abuse, rehabilitation will be a long path, started from the moment of her release. Mariam case represents a groundbreaking achievement towards ensuring the rights of victims of trafficking in Egypt.

The first time IOM met with Mariam in the hustle and bustle of the Egyptian Immigration offices she was sitting in silence, her eyes wide open, tormenting the sleeves of her hoodie. She whispered her story to the IOM doctor. Mariam’s story is told by the iron burns scars on her small hands. Hers is a story of despair, hope and freedom.

Mariam is sixteen. She had lived with her parents and siblings until her father sold her to work as a domestic aide for an Egyptian doctor. Mariam protested, she wanted to study. In 2006, when Mariam was ten, the Egyptian family returned to Cairo bringing her along. Once in Egypt, treatment turned abusive. Mariam was made to work excessive hours, never received any salary and her passport was confiscated. She was locked in the house, physically and emotionally abused. The employer insulted her and her loved ones. In all these years, she was not allowed to speak to her mother: every time her relatives tried to call, the employer hanged up the phone. Faith in God kept her alive and gave her the strength to steal the house keys, six years after being sold. She quickly packed some clothes, took her passport and sneaked out of her prison.

But detention was not over yet. Mariam was arrested on the



ground of migration law infringement. Thanks to the good cooperation of the Egyptian Authorities, she was soon released in compliance with the new Egyptian anti-human trafficking Law 64/2010. Mariam was recognized as a victim of trafficking (VOT) and assigned to a government shelter run by the National Council for Children and Motherhood (NCCM). The Public Prosecutor started investigating her case.

Under the EU-Italy funded IOM project RAVEL (“Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme for Migrants Stranded in Egypt and Libya”), Mariam was provided with a one way flight ticket and airport assistance upon departure, transit and arrival. In compliance with her rights as an unaccompanied minor, IOM made available an operational travel

escort during her trip home. Reintegration support will help her establish an income generating activity or pay education and medical fees.

Once she arrived in her country, Mariam was received by the child protection police and by the designated receiving VoT shelter, in coordination with UNICEF. After a couple of weeks at the shelter, she was finally reunited with her long lost family. Mariam will have the chance to attend professional courses (tailoring, hospitality or catering). When she left the Egyptian shelter the other girls asked her: “Who’s going to cook for us now?”, Mariam remembers with a smile. She wants to open an Egyptian restaurant in her country, because cooking is her passion. Mariam’s hands now display a cheerful glittered nail polish.

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