

Combating Human Trafficking

Case Study Seven

Victim: Cabdinuur, 29-year old Somali male in the UK

Type of Trafficking: bonded labour



Cabdi's Story:

My name is Cabdinuur but friends usually called me Cabdi, a very common name in Somalia which means "servant of God". I always wanted to work in hotels and I was hoping to get a job in Hargeisa a city near my village back home. The boss said that I was good but he had not work to give me. He said, however, that a Russian customer who had a hotel in UK asked him if he could recommend employees for building and maintenance jobs. In a few days he told me that the Russian was employing Somalis for his businesses through an employment agency in Mogadishu. He suggested that I visit them. The employment agency said that there was a job in the Russian's hotel with a salary of £25,000. I told them that I did not have a passport. They said that if I paid them a fee of £4,000 they would take care of my travel to London and all my travel and employment documentation. Back home everyone said that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I did not have the money but my father and his four brothers gave me all their savings as a loan that I would repay with my UK salary.

Fourteen of us left Mogadishu, all heading for UK building jobs. None of us had a passport, but we were told that Piotr, our minder, held all our travel documents. We went by truck to Djibouti and crossed over to Jazan. Through Saudi Arabia we reached Jordan and Cyprus in the Mediterranean. It was there where Piotr showed some officials a bunch of passports that I realised that something was wrong. They did not look like Somali passports and I was sure that they were fake. I entered the UK through Calais with a French passport and name. It was the only time I had a passport in my hands, then Piotr took it back. This was his key to my life – to the lives of all of us: he owned us!

In London, Piotr passed us over to Igor who told us that the plans had changed and the job in the hotel was no longer on. But he and his brothers had several jobs for us all over London. All 15 of us lived in a two bedroom flat in North London for the next three years. We were dropped off or picked up every day to and from 'projects' where we were working for at least 14 hours and getting paid £4 an hour. Igor was retaining money for our 'lodging' and our meals, normally turkey sandwiches. Among these projects, six were refurbishments of luxury hotels in central London and four were hotels in nearby cities. Not what I had imagined about working in hotels! In most projects we were never asked to show documents or work permits. Igor said that "protection money" had already been paid for us – and deducted from our wage. Only in a couple of occasions he had to show the fake passports.