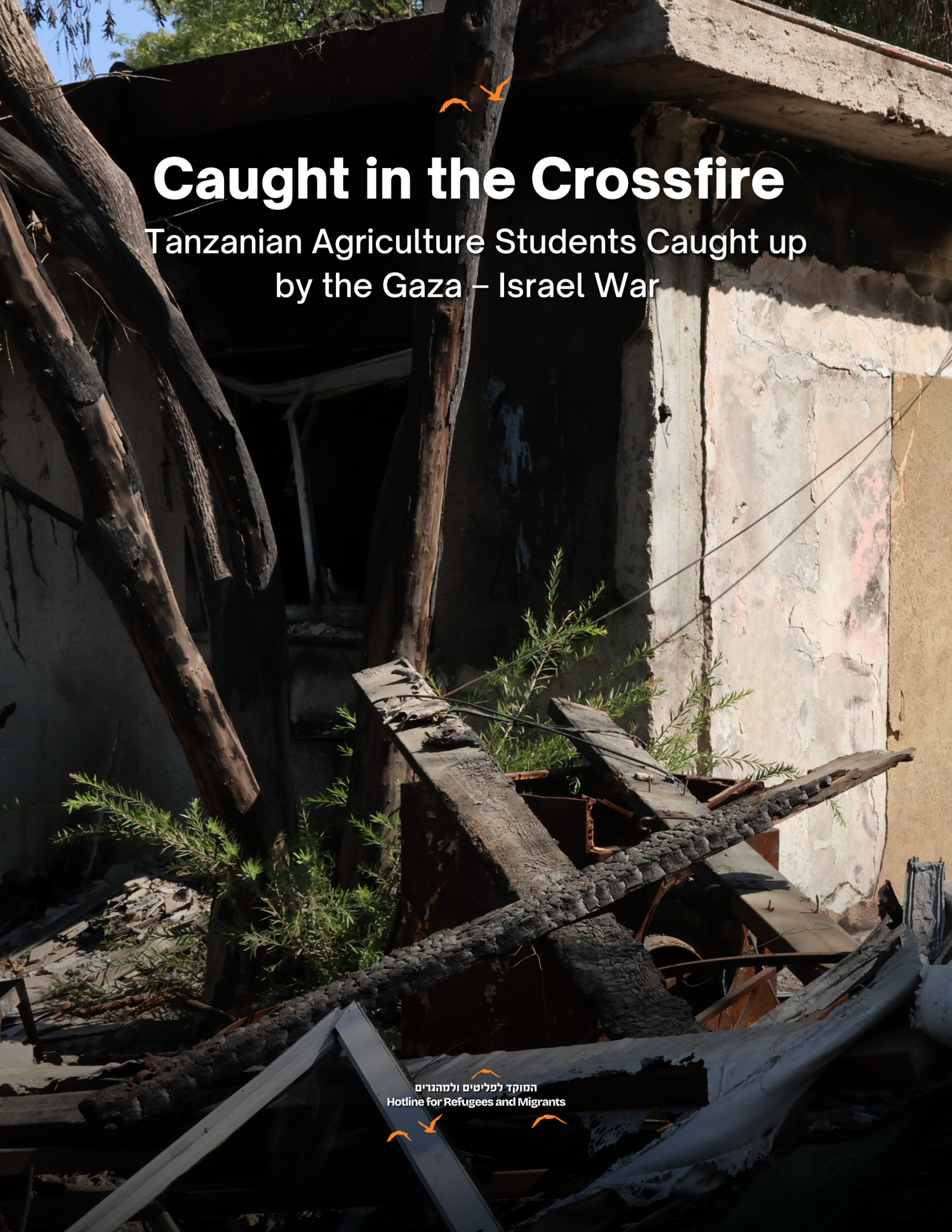


Caught in the Crossfire

Tanzanian Agriculture Students Caught up by the Gaza – Israel War

המוקד לפליטים ולמהגרים
Hotline for Refugees and Migrants

Caught in the Crossfire

Tanzanian Agriculture Students Caught up by the Gaza – Israel War

October 2024

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We want to thank the families of Joshua Loitu Mollel and Clemence Felix Mtenga, the two Tanzanian students who were murdered in the October 7th massacre, as well as the surviving Tanzanian students who shared their testimonies with us. We would also like to thank all those who assisted the victims' families and the survivors: The Tanzanian embassy in Israel, the civil Hostages and missing families' forum, Brothers and sisters in arms, human rights organizations, and concerned civilians.

Hotline for Refugees and Migrants is a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that aims to protect and promote the human rights of refugees, migrants, and human trafficking victims in Israel through client services, detention monitoring, legal action, and public policy initiatives.

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"***Two days after the massacre, on Monday, October 9, 2023, Daria (from Agrostudies) called and told us we needed to go to the dairy farm to take care of the cows, as Hamas had attacked the farm, destroyed generators, and killed cows. Soldiers came to take us from the apartment to the dairy farm that Monday at around 11 AM. We heard alarms and explosions from interceptions while we worked on the farm. It was very frightening. After work, the soldiers returned us to the apartment (in Mefalsim)"***.[1]

Introduction

In this document, we present the testimonies of agricultural students from Tanzania who came to Israel for a year of training and farm work and survived the massacre of October 7th. We also commemorate the memory of two Tanzanian students who were murdered in this massacre: **Joshua Loitu Mollel** and **Clemence Felix Mtenga.** Mollel's body is still being held by Hamas in Gaza, while his family pleads to bring him home for burial.

On the morning of October 7th, 2023, about 36 Tanzanian students, who had arrived in Israel for studies in August and September 2023 — just a short time before the massacre — were living and working in the Gaza envelope region. Based on their testimonies, these students were living in the city of Sderot and the kibbutzim: Mefalsim, Kissufim, Nahal Oz, and Nir Oz. They came to Israel to study at the Agrostudies Center as trainees and were supposed to start their studies at the Ibim Campus after the end of the holiday season. Until then, they worked alongside Thai agricultural workers employed in the area's kibbutzim, learning from their work experience.

Testimonies from the Tanzanian students indicate that the chaos characterizing the authorities' handling of the residents of the envelope area did not spare them. It took several days for the evacuation of the students from the settlements in the envelope to begin, and those living in Sderot were trapped in their apartment in combat and shelling zone for no

[1] From the testimony of Nahum Nkwama, a Tanzanian citizen who survived the October 7th massacre at Kibbutz Mefalsim, testimony collected by Elad Zamir from the HRM on August 12, 2024.

less than seven days until they were evacuated to safety. They were transferred from Sderot to the north on Friday and were already demanded to attend their new workplaces the next Sunday. Students evacuated from the kibbutzim testified that they attended their new workplaces five days after the evacuation.

It took long days to locate many foreigners in the Gaza envelope area due to the chaos that the October 7th massacre created. The Tanzanian students were not among those foreigners. From the testimonies in this report and others collected by the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants (HRM), it is evident that representatives of Agrostudies, the company that brought the students to Israel, spoke with them on the day of the massacre, advised them on how to protect themselves, and clarified that they would be evacuated when a new place will be located for them.

After several days trapped in their shelter in Sderot, a company representative came and accompanied one of the students to the only open Supermarket in the city to buy fresh supplies for the group for the next couple of days. Then, he returned him to his friends at the flat's little shelter.

Two other students who were trapped in their shelter in Kibbutz Mefalsim, two kilometers from the Gaza border, were taken under military escort two days after the massacre to milk the cows. On that very day, the dedicated dairy farmer Reuven Heinik also insisted on caring for his cows in Kibbutz Kissufim in the Gaza Envelope area, and convinced soldiers to accompany him. He was murdered by Hamas terrorists who were hiding in his dairy farm. Three soldiers were wounded in the battle that lasted there for several hours that day. Only three days later, the surrounding kibbutzim were purged of terrorists.[2] After they finished milking the cows, the two Tanzanian students were returned to their shelter and were evacuated from Kibbutz Mefalsim by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) only the next day.

The efforts of the HRM to help the survivors exercise their rights as victims of terrorism have so far been unsuccessful. We hope this document will

[2] Itay Ilnai, Four Days in October: the Full story of Purging the Gaza Envelope, Israel Hayom, September 20, 2024 (Hebrew) and Toi Staff, Reuven Heinik, 56, Dairy Farmer Wouldn't Abandon his Cows, Times of Israel, February 21, 2024.

assist in promoting positive responses from the National Insurance Institute (NII) to their requests.

Victims of Hamas Among the Tanzanian Students

On October 22, 2023, a call for help to locate Joshua Loitu Mollel, an agricultural student and Tanzanian citizen who lived and worked in Kibbutz Nahal Oz, was published on social media and various forums. Mollel had been missing since the morning of October 7th.[3] The next day, an interview with Joshua's father was broadcast on the BBC Swahili YouTube channel.[4] Immediately after these reports, the HRM team contacted the Tanzanian embassy in Israel to check if Joshua's family wished to maintain contact for updates, clarification, and assistance. During this interaction, the HRM team learned of another missing Tanzanian student, Clemence Felix Mtenga.

After establishing direct contact with the families, on October 26, the Tanzanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement regarding the disappearance of the two agricultural students. That same day, with the families' permission, HRM published their photos and stories on social media, raising suspicions that they had been kidnapped from Israel and were being held by Hamas in Gaza.[5] HRM also provided their names and photos to the Civilian Command Center of Brothers and Sisters in Arms, the Hostage Families Forum, and various news outlets in Israel and around the world that had been publishing lists of the missing and kidnapped individuals.

In mid-November 2023, volunteers were designated by the Hostage Families Forum to focus on non-Israeli hostages, and HRM representatives worked to integrate them into the support system for hostages and survivors of the massacre among the Tanzanian students. The Hostage Families Forum's volunteers arranged for an emergency

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[3] Urgent Appeal for Joshua Loitu Mollel - A Plea for Help and Prayers, October 22, 2023

[4] Alfred Lasteck, "Baba wa Mtanzania: Sina mawasiliano na mwanangu aliyepo Israel tangu mashambulizi ya Hamas," BBC News Swahili, October 23, 2023

[5] "They were also kidnapped," The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants on Facebook, October 26, 2023

grant for the foreign families as well as donations of clothes to the students who were evacuated without their personal belongings from the Kibbutzim and the city of Sderot.

During those days, the HRM team contacted students who survived the massacre, collected testimonies, and attempted to gather any information that might lead to a clue regarding the whereabouts of Joshua and Clemence. The HRM team connected Joshua's father, Loitu, with Evasius, a student who had shared a room with Joshua in Kibbutz Nahal Oz and had survived the massacre. In addition, the HRM team reached out to the NII and filled out forms for the survivors to recognize them as victims of "front-line hostilities". Long months passed until identification numbers that were acceptable by the NII's computerized system were arranged for the students to facilitate their grants.

In August 2024, the NII informed the HRM team that compensation for the rehabilitation period had been paid to those present in communities where active fighting occurred, regardless of income and situation until April 1, 2024. Claims submitted after that date were reviewed under the NII regulations, meaning that if they had continued working after the massacre and did not provide medical documentation of physical or psychological injury, they were no longer eligible for any financial compensation.

Testimonies of Roommates of the Two Tanzanian Students Murdered by Hamas Terrorists

Ezekiel Nathaniel Kitiku, a Tanzanian citizen, lived with Clemence Felix Mtenga in Kibbutz Nir Oz and went to work at the Nir Maon dairy farm on the morning of the massacre. He described the events of that morning and the long three days that followed until he was finally evacuated:

"I arrived in Israel from Tanzania on September 18, 2023, just a short time before Hamas's attack. My friend Clemence and I were studying agronomy at the university and had come for a year of training at Ibim. We hadn't started studying yet because of the holidays in Israel. Clemence arrived in Israel on September 13, a week before me. We lived in Kibbutz Nir Oz and worked at the Nir Maon dairy farm near Nir Oz.

At the Nir Maon dairy, there were two Tanzanian students (Clemence and I) and five Thai workers. I know that two of them are now in Jerusalem, but I don't know where the others are. I left Clemence at the dairy on Friday afternoon. On Saturday morning, when the sirens started, Clemence called me and asked if I was in the shelter. I told him yes, and he said he was too. Around 10:00 AM, I tried to call him again, but he didn't answer. I sent him a WhatsApp message, but it didn't go through. I stayed alone in the shelter all of Saturday. I heard gunfire. ***On Sunday afternoon, October 8, I tried to leave the shelter. I saw Israeli soldiers, and they asked me who I was. I explained, and they told me to go back to my shelter. I stayed there for another two days****. It wasn't easy to be in a closed shelter for so long, with the sounds of war all around and not knowing what was going to happen. There was a refrigerator with yogurts near the shelter, so I ate yogurts for the three days I was there until I was rescued.*

On October 10, soldiers came again and took me to Be'er Tuvia, where I am now. In Be'er Tuvia, there are six of us together: three women from the Philippines—I'm not sure where they were brought from—and two other Tanzanian students, who were brought from Kibbutz Kissufim."[6]

On November 18, 2023, a little more than a month after the massacre, the body of Clemence Felix Mtenga was identified. In some reports published following the discovery of Mtenga's death, it was mentioned that his body was found in Israeli territory. In contrast, other reports claimed that his body was "rescued" from Shifa Hospital in Gaza. This contradictory information confused and worried Mtenga's family, who feared that Clemence had indeed been kidnapped and murdered while in captivity. In efforts to clarify the situation, HRM approached *Haaretz* journalist Ofer Aderet, whose investigation revealed that Clemence's body had indeed been found in Israeli territory on October 7, near the Gaza border.[7] The body was taken to the Shura Camp, where the identification process took some time due to the need for a DNA sample from the family in Tanzania.

[6] The testimony was given to Sigal Rozen of the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants on October 26, 2023, in a telephone conversation.

[7] The Tanzanian man whose body was recently identified was killed on October 7, not kidnapped as first reported, Ofer Aderet, Haaretz, November 19, 2023.

Once the identification was confirmed, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs facilitated the transfer of Clemence's body to his homeland for burial.

Evasius Helmengrid Cleophace, a Tanzanian citizen and roommate of Joshua Loitu Mollel, survived the massacre in Kibbutz Nahal Oz. He described the terrifying moments in a conversation with an HRM representative:

"I arrived in Israel on September 7, 2023, as part of a study and agricultural work program through Agrostudies. They placed Joshua and me in Kibbutz Nahal Oz, where we lived and worked, with plans to begin studying agriculture at the Ibim campus in October. We were the only two Tanzanians at the kibbutz. On the morning of October 7, 2023, I was asleep in the room I shared with Joshua.

At 6:30 AM, when the rocket attack began, Joshua was on a shift at the dairy farm, and I was alone in the room. I woke up to the sound of rockets. I immediately called Joshua, and he told me he had heard the siren and was in the shelter near the dairy farm. I stayed in our room. The Thai worker who worked with Joshua ran to his room, so both Joshua and I were alone. We talked on the phone for about three hours, until around 9:00 AM, when the electricity went out, and our phones stopped working. I spent the entire day alone in my locked room, which I think also served as a shelter. I heard people walking around the room several times and knocking on the door. I managed to see them through the window. Our coordinator from Agrostudies sent me pictures on WhatsApp of the uniforms of the IDF, police, and Border Police so I would know who to open the door for. I saw that the people trying to get in were wearing civilian clothes and not uniforms, so I understood it was better not to open the door. ***Luckily, they didn't try to force their way in and eventually left. Throughout the day, I had no idea what was happening outside, only hearing the sounds of heavy shelling and constant gunfire. It was terrifying****. I didn't leave the room until Sunday morning, hearing shooting all day. It was the most frightening experience, and I feared those wandering around meant us harm.*

On Sunday morning, my manager at the dairy farm, Raymond, sent me a phone number of a soldier and told me he would come to evacuate me. I

sent the soldier my location on WhatsApp. Soldiers came and took me from Kibbutz Nahal Oz to Kibbutz Mishmar HaEmek. They evacuated everyone from Nahal Oz to Mishmar HaEmek.

I was the only Tanzanian at Mishmar HaEmek, and it was very difficult for me there because I couldn't sleep at night. I kept thinking about my friend Joshua, who disappeared, and my university friend Clemence, who vanished from Kibbutz Nir Oz. At Mishmar HaEmek, they offered me to speak with a psychologist. I'm glad I spoke with her because it helped me get back to sleep at night. However, I had no one to talk to at Mishmar HaEmek, so I asked my manager to move me to a place where the other Tanzanian students were staying.

After about a week, my manager moved me to Kibbutz Ginosar, where I now live with two other Tanzanian students who were brought from Kibbutz Mefalsim. During these months I learned that my friends, Clemence and Joshua, were murdered by Hamas. A horrific video of Joshua's murder was shared on social media and circulated in our groups. Unfortunately, I saw it, and it caused me a great deal of distress. I understand that here at Kibbutz Ginosar, I'm far from the Gaza border and the terrorists, and I am safe, but I have dark thoughts about the fate of my friends and how it could have been me. They didn't try to break into my room by chance, and that saved my life. When I think of Clemence and Joshua, I feel terrible."[8]

In recent months, Evasius was relocated to Kibbutz Ayelet HaShahar, which has also been under repeated missile and drone attacks. In August 2024, an officer and soldier were injured in one of these attacks.

Government Authorities' Treatment of the Family of Hostage Joshua Loitu Mollel

On December 13, 2023, Joshua's father, Loitu, was informed by Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs representatives that his son had been murdered and that his son's body was being held by Hamas. When he asked for

[8] The initial testimony was given to Sigal Rozen of the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants in a telephone conversation on October 28, 2023, and was completed in additional conversations in the following months.

clarification on what this information was based on, he was told that he would need to come to Israel to receive further details and evidence confirming the news. Lacking further information, documentation, or a body, Loitu refused to accept the news and did not dare share it with his family, especially not with Joshua's mother. While Loitu still refused to believe the devastating news and was deliberating whether to travel to Israel, and before sharing anything with his family, news of Joshua's murder was published in Israel. The first announcement came from Kibbutz Nahal Oz, which also stated that Loitu was on his way to Israel, although at that time, he had not yet decided to come, nor did he believe that his son was no longer alive.[9]

A few days later, while Joshua's family still did not believe he had been murdered, the "South First Responders" Telegram channel, which documents the atrocities of the October 7 massacre, published three videos. In the first, Joshua is seen surrounded by a crowd as he exits the kibbutz's dairy farm. The second video shows his murder, and the third shows his body lying motionless on the floor of a truck driving toward Gaza. These videos were widely circulated on social media, including on X (formerly Twitter), shared by the Israeli journalist Elad Simchayoff, Israeli influencer Yosef Haddad, and even the official account of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[10] The extended Mollel family was devastated to learn of their son's murder through these horrific videos. Joshua's father, Loitu, urgently requested that the videos be removed from the internet. In response, the videos were taken down, leaving only posts describing the brutal murder. However, by that point, the videos had already spread across social media, making it impossible to completely remove them.

On the day of the massacre, Hamas terrorists uploaded many videos to social media showing their victims, and in some cases, the murders themselves. However, out of the hundreds of videos of this nature, the

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[9] Joshua Loitu Mollel from Tanzania, who was kidnapped from Nahal Oz, was murdered in Gaza, Yael Czechanover, Itamar Eichner, and Matan Tzuri, Ynet, December 13, 2023 (Hebrew).

[10] The videos were uploaded and shared on social media starting December 17, 2023.

only ones that reached the media without the families' knowledge not by Hamas, but by those who collected the footage from the Hamas terrorists' body cameras, were those involving foreign nationals: the video documenting the interrogation of a Hamas terrorists describing the murder and abduction of agricultural workers at Kibbutz Alumim, and the video showing the abduction of Bipin Joshi, a student from Nepal, and Pornsawan Pinagalo, a Thai agricultural worker, who were taken from Kibbutz Alumim to Shifa Hospital in Gaza.[11] Similarly, the Israeli authorities released the three videos of Joshua Mollel's brutal murder without notifying or obtaining permission from his family. The video of Joshi and Pinagalo at Shifa was located at Shifa hospital and handed over to the media by Israeli forces, while the murder videos were retrieved and distributed by Israeli security forces from the body cameras of Hamas terrorists who had been captured or killed in Gaza by the IDF.

During this year, many Israeli families have received the devastating news of their loved ones' murders. Others were given information and videos showing their relatives in Hamas captivity. Some families chose to share these videos with the Israeli media. In cases where there were no censorship restrictions, the choice and timing of releasing such information remained with the families.

During this period, Hamas and Islamic Jihad also released videos of hostages in captivity, calling on Israel to sign a deal for their release and to stop the fighting. While these videos were available on social media, the Israeli official media consistently refrained from publishing them without obtaining the permission of the families of the hostages shown in the videos. They also made sure to emphasize this fact. Only the videos involving citizens from Nepal, Thailand, and Tanzania were shared by the media. According to the families' testimonies, it was through these videos that the families learned of the fate of their kidnapped loved ones.

About ten days after the announcement of Joshua's murder, on Christmas Eve, his father, Loitu, arrived in Israel, accompanied by his nephew. They were met at Ben Gurion Airport by representatives of the Tanzanian Embassy in Israel and the HRM. During their four-day stay in Israel, the

[11] KAN News on X: "A Hamas terrorist described in a Shin Bet interrogation how they kidnapped people from Kibbutz Alumim and transferred them to Shifa Hospital in Gaza | Footage," November 27, 2023.

Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs arranged meetings with representatives of the IDF, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Agrostudies. Loitu also met with his legal representative from the Legal Aid Department, Nahal Oz people, the Hostage Families Forum, and the HRM. The authorities organized a visit for the family to Kibbutz Nahal Oz, where Joshua had lived and worked, and from where he was kidnapped. They also held a respectful ceremony to honor Joshua's memory. While the Mollel family expressed gratitude to the Israeli officials for the respectful treatment they received during their visit, they continue to hope, like all the other families, that they will be able to bring their son home for burial.

Testimony of a Survivor from Kibbutz Mefalsim

Nahum Nkwama, a Tanzanian citizen who survived the October 7th massacre at Kibbutz Mefalsim, told an HRM representative:

"On October 7th, I was in Apartment No. 451 in Kibbutz Mefalsim with Isaya Mng'ongo. We had arrived in Israel on September 20, 2023, just two and a half weeks before. Isaya and I worked together at the dairy farm during the week.

Around 6 AM, we heard explosions and gunfire outside. I was already in the shelter where I slept, and Isaya quickly joined me. We decided to stay in the shelter. We called Daria, our coordinator at Agrostudies, and she told us to stay there until we were told it was safe to leave Mefalsim for a safer place. We took some food and water into the shelter. We heard explosions and alarms almost non-stop, day after day, as well as the sounds of people running. We tried to contact friends, to check what was happening with friends in Nir Oz and Nahal Oz, and they told us they were being evacuated by the army. We also checked the internet, on Twitter, to find out what was happening. I saw a Hamas terrorist claiming he had killed eight people in Mefalsim. It was very scary, and it was impossible to sleep due to fear.

Two days after the massacre, on Monday, October 9, 2023, Daria (from Agrostudies) called and told us we needed to go to the dairy farm to take care of the cows, as Hamas had attacked the farm, destroyed generators, and killed cows. Soldiers came to take us

from the apartment to the dairy farm that Monday at around 11 AM. We heard alarms and explosions from interceptions while we worked on the farm. It was very frightening. After work, the soldiers returned us to the apartment (in Mefalsim).

The next day, on Tuesday, October 10, 2023, they wanted us to return to the farm to milk the cows, but in the afternoon, the soldiers decided to evacuate us from the kibbutz and take us to a hotel in Netanya*. In Netanya, we heard the sound of helicopters near the sea, and we were scared and hid; we didn't leave the hotel at all. Every noise we heard outside made us panic, not knowing what else could happen to us.*

After five days, on October 15, 2023, they moved us to Kibbutz Ginosar, where we stayed and worked for about three months, in the same apartment with Evasius, who had been in Kibbutz Nahal Oz. Evasius told us about Joshua Loitu Mollel, who Hamas had taken from Nahal Oz. After a few months, we saw on social media a video in which Hamas terrorists beat Joshua, and also shot him."[12]

Testimony of a Survivor from Sderot

This is how Venance Radislaus Fredrick, a Tanzanian citizen who survived the massacre in Sderot, described the events from October 7th until they were evacuated from the city seven days later:

"On the morning of Saturday, October 7, 2023, all twelve of us Tanzanian agricultural students were in the two floors of the building where we lived, located at 8 Yitzhak Sadeh Street in Sderot. We had all come to Israel as part of the Agrostudies training program in September 2023, less than a month before the Hamas attack. We were supposed to start our studies in October 2023. Agrostudies had housed us in the city of Sderot, and we had begun working at packing houses as soon as we arrived in the country.

On the morning of October 7, 2023, at around 6:30 AM, the sound of explosions woke us up. We heard rockets falling and then the alarms. We knew we had to go to the shelter on the lower floor, and Oshri, our

[12] The testimony was given by phone conversation to Elad Zamir of the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants on August 12, 2024.

supervisor, called to tell us we had to enter the shelter. Two of our friends were already sleeping in the shelter. I and nine others entered the shelter, and we stayed there all day. The shelter is a small, regular room in the apartment, and twelve of us were packed in there, very crowded and terrified.

We only left the shelter to go to the bathroom or bring food when it was safe between the explosions. Rockets fell very close to our building. We saw from the window the damage and lots of fire and smoke. We heard gunfire nearby. We saw a gunfight at the Rami Levy supermarket not far from our apartment. While we sat in the shelter, we saw on our phones and social media people with guns shooting at police officers on familiar streets in Sderot. We saw on social media videos that the gunmen were also entering buildings in the city and going up to rooftops. We were terrified that they would also enter our apartment. Oshri, our supervisor at Agrostudies, told us by phone that they were looking for a way to rescue us from there, and in the meantime, we should stay in the shelter because it was very dangerous outside.

For several days, we stayed in the shelter for most of the day and night because the rocket fire didn't stop. We also heard gunfire for about three days, though farther from where we were staying. We left the shelter to bring food, fearing it would run out. After a few days, I'm not sure how many, a representative from Agrostudies came and took one of us with him to buy groceries at one open supermarket. He saw that all the stores were closed except for this one. Oshri told us again that the company was looking for a place to evacuate us from Sderot.

Our families in Tanzania heard about the massacre in Israel and called us, worried about our fate. Some of us told them we were in a different area because we didn't want to scare them, but the calls from our families, while we were trapped in the small shelter together, made us even more anxious. During these days, we also discovered that two of our friends from the program, Joshua Loitu Mollel and Clemence Mtenga, who worked in Kibbutz Nahal Oz and Nir Oz, were missing and had likely been kidnapped by Hamas.

On Friday, seven days after the rocket attacks and the terrorists' gunfire began, Agrostudies representatives arrived at the apartment and moved

us to an apartment at 8 Varda Lerner Street in Afula, where we stayed until January 12, 2024. Two days later, on October 16, 2023, we started working at a packing house in Beit She'an. During the time we stayed in Afula, we learned that Clemence Mtenga had been murdered by Hamas terrorists. Later, a video of Joshua's brutal murder was circulated on social media and shared in our groups, leading to dark thoughts. We heard that many residents of Sderot were killed that day by the terrorists who entered the city, which caused us great fear and the realization that, by the grace of God, our fate had been different. We knew we were safe in Afula, but the thoughts of Clemence and Joshua were overwhelming, and it was difficult to stop thinking about the horrific video of Joshua's murder.

On Friday, January 12, 2024, we were returned to our apartment at 8 Yitzhak Sadeh Street in Sderot and resumed working in the packing houses in the area. We were told that it was now safe to stay in Sderot, but we continued to hear rocket fire and still felt scared."[13]

While the evacuation of all Sderot residents continued until the end of February 2024, the Tanzanian students were required to return to the city more than a month and a half earlier, on January 12, 2024, during a period when Hamas was frequently shelling the city. From January to May 2024, when the students were transferred from the heavily shelled city of Sderot to Moshav Yinon near Kiryat Malachi, they occasionally called the HRM representatives in distress during the sirens, trying to understand which area was being bombed and whether there were casualties.

Efforts to Secure the "Front-Line" Grant for Tanzanian Students in the Gaza Envelope

Conversations with the Tanzanian students revealed that they were suffering from anxiety following the Hamas attack, the kidnapping, and the murder of their fellow students. The families of the victims, including foreign ones, received representation from the Legal Aid Department, whose lawyers acted and continue to act to help them exercise their rights as bereaved families. However, survivors of the massacre, those injured,

[13] The testimony was given to Sigal Rozen of the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants on December 23, 2023, in Afula, and was updated on January 15, 2024, after the students were returned from Afula to Sderot.

and those evacuated did not receive representation, despite their physical or emotional distress. When HRM representatives learned of the possibility of obtaining a “Front-Line” grant, which provides financial assistance and emotional support, they quickly moved to interview the students who had been trapped in the Gaza envelope during the first week of the war and collected the necessary documents to prepare the claims.

On January 10, 2024, an HRM representative contacted a representative from the NII Pensions Department, explaining the situation of the Tanzanian students who were trapped in the Gaza envelope on October 7 and requested assistance in submitting forms to the NII for “Front-Line” victims, given that the students did not have Israeli ID numbers. It seems like the NII representative understood that the students were indeed entitled to the “Front-Line” grant, as she expressed a willingness to assist and promptly issued a special number known as a "77 number" for one of the students to test how the system could help them exercise their rights.

On January 22, 2024, the HRM representative completed the online form for the first Tanzanian student following the NII representative's instructions. The representative provided HRM with a different form from the one the students had filled out with the help of HRM. Therefore, the HRM representative spoke again with the students, gathered additional information to complete the new form, and on February 11, 2024, sent an email to the NII representative with the details of ten Tanzanian students. On March 5, 2024, the NII representative sent a list of identification numbers for the ten students from Sderot whose documents had been sent by the HRM representative. On April 1, 2024, the HRM representative sent a further reminder and an additional request, including the documents of two more students who had been trapped in Sderot, as well as two other students from Nahal Oz and Nir Oz, who had shared rooms with Joshua and Clemence, who had been murdered by Hamas terrorists. On May 21, the NII representative confirmed once again that she would issue identification numbers to the students, allowing them to submit online claims for the Front-Line grant, and on July 14, 2024, the HRM representative completed the online forms for seven more Tanzanian students who expressed interest in doing so. In August 2024, the HRM representatives were informed by the NII that only until the beginning of April 2024 was a medical treatment compensation grant, equivalent to two

months' salary paid to those present in communities where active fighting occurred, without checking their income. However, anyone who submitted a claim after April 1, 2024, was reviewed according to regulations, and if they had continued to work after the massacre and did not submit medical documentation of physical or psychological harm, they were no longer entitled to any financial compensation.

Most of the students returned to Tanzania already. Their Israeli bank accounts will remain open until the end of 2024. The HRM representatives continue their efforts to persuade NII to accept the students' claims for front-line two months compensation. HRM hopes that NII will accept the claims under the conditions valid till April 1, 2024, since the students were demanded to continue working immediately after the massacre.

Summary

Approximately 5,000 migrant workers, foreign students, and refugees were living and working in the Gaza envelope during the Hamas attack.[14]

According to updated information by NII, 72 migrant workers, refugees, and foreign students who lived and worked in the Gaza envelope were murdered in the October 7th attack: citizens of Thailand, Nepal, China, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Cambodia, Eritrea, and Sudan. 34 foreigners were kidnapped to Gaza. 24 were released in November 2023. 10 foreigners are still held hostage in Gaza for more than a year now, while seven of them might still be alive. NII accepted the claims of more than 70,000 people who were affected by the massacre, among them 647 foreigners who were wounded and managed to prove it.[15]

Testimonies from survivors of the attack in the Gaza envelope, as well as those included in this report, show that during the first days after the attack only civil society organizations, such as Brothers and Sisters in Arms, the Hostage Families Forum, human rights organizations, and kind-hearted

[14] Hagar Shezaf and Shira Makin, "The Unseen Victims of Hamas: Thai Workers in Israel" Haaretz, October 16, 2023

[15] Liam Adive, One year into war: 885 civilians killed, nearly 10,000 wounded - National Insurance Institute, Jerusalem Post, October 6, 2024, and Kav LaOved – The Workers Hotline website: Psychosocial Risk Factors in the Work of Migrant Workers in Israel During the War (Hebrew).

civilians, assisted the migrant workers and foreign students trapped in the Gaza envelope communities. The state authorities failed to provide psychological or financial assistance. The authorities also did not supervise to ensure that the employers of these workers and students would not send them back to areas under frequent shelling.

Although they were not forcibly returned to Sderot, the students who were trapped in Sderot for a week at the beginning of the war made it clear that they did not feel they could resist returning to the heavily shelled city as early as January 2024. Some even fled after their return when they could no longer bear the alarms and shelling. One student who survived the massacre in Nahal Oz lived most of his stay in Israel in Kibbutz Ayelet HaShahar in the Upper Galilee, a kibbutz regularly bombarded by Hezbollah, where two soldiers were injured in these attacks lately. Testimonies from the students working in Mefalsim reveal that they were sent to milk the cows in the days following the massacre, a task to which they were accompanied by IDF soldiers since Hamas terrorists were still in the area.

The Tanzanian students emphasized to HRM representatives how important it was for them to complete the year-long program of training and work for which they had received permission to stay in Israel, to the extent that most of them prioritized this over their safety and went to every work or living location to which they were sent.

The Israeli authorities justly allocated free legal representation to the families of foreign citizens who were murdered and kidnapped. This representation enabled them to exhaust their rights, even though nothing can compensate for such a great loss. It would be appropriate for the Israeli authorities to ensure that these guests in our country, who were locked up for long days in fighting zones in the same way as their Israeli neighbors, are compensated with the same benefits received by their Israeli counterparts. Furthermore, the state must ensure that no students or migrant workers risk their lives in war zones. Such endangerment is even more grave when it involves those who survived the massacre and learned about their friends' brutal murders but received no psychosocial care.