

I Am Angry. I Am a Refugee. My Family Took Me Aged 5 from the War in My Country Which Killed 5 of My Brothers and Sisters.

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On a really cold day at the beginning of March, 7 people drowned off the coast of Lesvos. They were refugees, some from Somalia where I was born. On the same day the Greek government was shouting out that it was opening its arms and sending planes and buses to bring refugees from Ukraine to Greece.

I am a refugee. My family took me aged 5 from the war in my country which killed 5 of my brothers and sisters; my father was badly injured and, until his death in Somalia 4 weeks ago, struggled to live with his body filled with bomb fragments. My own move to Uganda saved my life but was a total disaster. From 9 years old I was homeless and alone. I had no schooling, no bed and survived on the streets. At the age of 24 I had a friend who got me out to Turkey and then I came to Samos where I applied for asylum. As yet I have no decision. I live in fear of deportation. Greece’s government decided in June last year that refugees from Somalia are, as Muslims, safe in Turkey and should be returned to make their asylum case there. But the government here does not tell the truth. Turkey is not a safe place for refugees from Somalia and many places.

Yesterday I met a Ukrainian refugee in a hospital in Athens. She is quite old. She was in a bad way with wounds to her stomach. She told me that she was alone and when bombed had escaped from her home. She had left her pet cats and dogs and her chickens. They would be dead now. We cried together.

I am more than ok that the refugees from Ukraine are being helped by many European countries including Greece. I am pleased that they are being sent buses and planes to travel to Greece and are not expected to come here like me in a rubber boat at night. I am pleased that they will get very quickly the papers they need to stay, work and get medical help in Greece. I am pleased that they are being offered good places to stay and not being sent to

refugee camps like the prison on Samos even though it has loads of space these days.

But

I am so angry with the Greek government which only cares for refugees from the Ukraine. Its message to me is clear. The refugees from Ukraine are seen as people like the Greeks. But refugees like me from Africa and the middle eastern countries are not such 'good' humans. We are insulted! All my friends are angry like me. Those who have got their papers are now being abandoned. Many are now losing their homes as the big refugee aid groups like Praxis are closing down. And in the past week we see the police in Thessaloniki and Athens targeting non Ukrainian refugees. Last week in one neighbourhood in Athens they took 69 refugees for immediate deportation because they did not have any papers on them. On the same day I was followed by 2 police to my apartment where I was asked for my papers.

Most of us are convinced that what is happening now shows the deep racism of the current Government. We hate the minister responsible for refugees, Notis Mitarakis. He has never said or done anything good for us. His talking about the Ukrainian refugees as real refugees and us as fake is just one example of his racism. But what we find hard to understand is why the Greek government is now ok with being seen as racist. It seems stupid to us. Will so many people want to holiday here? We hope not.

One major point we talk a lot about is the ways in which we see Greece as being frightened of Islam. Many seem to think we want to convert all Greeks to our religion. Many seem to think that Islam completely controls our lives and makes us into different types of human beings with nothing in common with Greek people. So they say we have no place here. They tell us to see Greece only as a gateway to Europe. Move on. Don't stay here. You will never belong here.

But it is crazy thinking. It is so wrong in hundreds of ways. There are thousands of Muslims now living in Athens and Thessaloniki from many different countries. Many live in peace with their Greek neighbours. We shop in the same places; work together and play together. Things are getting better in our relationships. We know that we face the same problems with many Greeks as petrol and electricity price rises cripple us. We help each other.

Like many of my friends I see the government and not the people as the problem. We are shocked by the war in Ukraine. We must help these refugees. But we must also speak out and demand that all refugees should be treated as the Ukrainians. We cannot accept the government dividing the refugees by saying that those from Ukraine deserve better and kinder treatment than us because they are not Muslims and are mainly with white skin.

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