

Israel Deported Them. Then ISIS Cut Off Their Heads.

By Creede Newton, The Daily Beast

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Three of the Ethiopian Christians beheaded by ISIS were living in Israel—until the government got them to leave.

JERUSALEM—In a scene that's become all too familiar, the self-proclaimed Islamic State has executed a group of individuals it deems infidels.

A recently released video shows the latest victims of the extremist group, initially thought to be solely Ethiopian Christians, being beheaded in what appears to be Libya.

But there's a catch: At least three of the victims were Eritrean refugees who had been deported from Israel. An Eritrean named Mesi Fashiya who works as a translator for The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, an Israeli NGO that advocates for Israel's estimated 46,000 refugees, identified the victims.

Sadly, one was her relative.

Fashiya told the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz that her cousin, identified as "T.," was deported from Israel "back to Uganda or Rwanda—I think Rwanda—where they are not accepted. From there he went on to Sudan, and from Sudan to Libya."

"I recognized my relative, T., from the photos published by ISIS that appeared on Facebook before the video was released," Fashiya told +972 magazine.

T. was sent abroad in a program that Israel initiated to deal with its burgeoning refugee problem. In a brochure obtained by The Daily Beast, the Israeli Population and Immigration Authority "offers foreign

nationals from [Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, and Guinea Conakry], who entered Israel illegally, the option to leave the country voluntarily, in a fair and dignified manner.”

In the brochure, Israel offers to assist in the “arrangement of travel documents, purchase of airline tickets, and a financial grant in the amount of \$3,500 per person, including children,” to asylum seekers who agree to leave.

While this may seem a fair deal, Israel’s record with asylum seekers and migrant workers is, for lack of a better word, awful.

“During the past few years we see that government policy is becoming worse towards asylum seekers,” Hagar Shechter, head of public relations at Assaf, an Israeli NGO that provides legal assistance to refugees, told The Daily Beast.

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Assaf recently released a report detailing not only the extreme difficulties refugees face in deportation from Israel to third countries but also the “fear of arbitrary detention and other inappropriate means are utilized by the State of Israel to pressure asylum seekers to agree to leave” the holy land.

For Schecter, this is part and parcel of Israel’s policy toward refugees, which she says consists “mostly of inaction,” except for intimidation. The Israeli government has granted “0.17 percent of the requests for recognition of refugee status,” the aid worker added. “This means that out of thousands and thousands of people, only four got a positive answer.”

Even worse, the Israeli government has chosen to round up and imprison a portion of the refugees.

“Last year, the Israeli government built a detention camp to lock them up,” she continued. Holot, the camp, is in the middle of Israel’s Negev desert, and conditions there are dire.

“About 2,000 people are imprisoned in this camp, placed in the middle of the desert, far from any public transport,” she said.

T., one of the Eritreans executed, served time in Holot.

According to Fashiya, the experience discouraged T. from continuing his struggle for refugee status in Israel, and he was further persuaded by Israeli authorities. “They told him he would be better off if he flies. I asked him not to. He didn’t tell us he had signed [papers] to leave,” Fashiya told Ha’aretz.

In another crushing twist, Fashiya told Ha’aretz that she believes T. wanted to reach Europe from Libya by boat.

On Saturday, a vessel carrying 950 migrants from North Africa capsized, and only 28 are thought to have survived. It is the latest in a long line of catastrophes involving the drowning of people from embattled nations.

This particularly gruesome event has stirred a strong reaction from the European Union, which is scrambling to come up with a comprehensive strategy to deal with the flood of refugees reaching the shores of Mediterranean E.U. nations.

On Sunday, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi called an emergency cabinet meeting to discuss a plan to deal with these disasters, along with the arrival of more than 11,000 people from Libya over a 10-day period.

There’s no way of knowing whether T. or the other two Eritreans who died with him would have made it onto the boats bound for Europe—or whether they would have died in the warm waters that many Westerners enjoy every summer.

What is known is that before ISIS's blade met the necks of these three Eritreans who had been fleeing conflict for a large portion of their lives, they were in a wealthy nation that sees itself as an oasis of human rights in a storm of atrocities.

Israel and many nations in the E.U. need to address their extreme mismanagement of the many crises in the region. Until they do, there will be no shortage of reasons for outrage coming out of nations with Mediterranean coastlines.