

Mock Asylum Interview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvUHMWVsVek>

Introduction

[Applause] hello everybody how's everyone doing today everyone's good okay please don't be shy if you can't hear what we're saying we're saying it to you and for you so if you're not hearing us let us know please okay so my name is Caitlin Steinke and I am an asylum attorney who volunteers with RIF and today what you're going to be seeing is something that I've been working on for a while and I'm very very grateful to RIF and to Martha for helping us make it a reality today what you're going to be seeing right here is sort of a demonstration of what an asylum interview looks like okay I'm going to be here the whole time and I'm going to be pausing the interview at various moments when I want to point out things to you and discuss them with you okay sorry I'm sort of ignoring my script completely the purpose of this performance is to give you a better sense of what your asylum interview will be like and to provide you with some helpful strategies for the interview so the purpose of what they're going to be saying to one another is not it's not to show you the correct answer to anything or the right type of case that you could have for asylum the correct answer is going to depend on the individual asylum case so the purpose is to help you understand the various ways that the asylum officer will ask a question the kinds of information the asylum officers looking for in your answer to the question and most importantly some ways that you can start thinking about how you can answer certain questions and the goal here is to make you feel more confident going into your interview - how do you feel like you understand what's about to happen better and that you feel more prepared for the interview so it's very important that you remember every single person's asylum case is going to be different and the case today it does involve a situation involving police abuse of the asylum seeker not everyone's case will involve harm by the police and you can still be eligible for asylum even if you were never harmed by the police so just remember that this is not a presentation on what kinds of cases make you eligible for asylum what kind of cases are strong asylum cases I don't even really want you to be paying too much attention to the story that's being told I want you to instead be really focusing on what is the question the asylum officer is asking and thinking about what's a good response to that question how can I respond to that question

anyway that's actually answering that question and not sort of floating to the side of the question okay and of course

I have to say this please remember that none of what I'm saying today is a substitute for legal advice it's not

legal advice to anyone in here these are strategies that can help you be more prepared for your asylum interview to

the extent that you can it's always best to consult with an asylum attorney about your individual case and your your

personal circumstances and the specific facts of your case a full asylum

interview can last between an hour and a half two three even four hours we're not going to keep you here that long today

this is when you have very condensed shortened version of that so there will be a lot of parts of the asylum

interview that I'm going to sort of cut out from the performance today okay so just keep in mind this is not going to

be completely comprehensive it's not to cover every moment of an interview I

also want everyone to please be aware that there will be portions of the demonstration today where the asylum

seeker is going to discuss police harming him there will be stories about

a police interrogation and torture and abuse by the police everyone is here

voluntarily and we have not locked the doors if anyone wants to leave for any reason at any time during the interview

please please do that I want you all to feel safe and comfortable with this

experience and if it is becoming uncomfortable for anybody you are welcome to leave and you can always

watch it later online also during the portions of the performance where I'm

having conversations with you I want them to be as interactive as possible and I want them to actually be

conversations I'm going to be pointing out things and asking you for suggestions on how the asylum seeker

could have perhaps answered a question better please go ahead and yell out answers okay I want you to be really

thinking about this I want you to be paying attention to what's being said and thinking about how the answer could

have been stronger so I will be asking for your participation I won't call on anybody I hate that more

than anything in the world but if you do if you do have something to contribute by all means to you there's no wrong

answers here okay you will see that the asylum seeker does have paper on the

table that is his script for this performance only please remember that at your asylum

interview you are not allowed to bring in any papers that you can read off of okay that's just for purposes of this

performance also at a real asylum interview you will be sitting across

from the asylum officer at a table yeah their face a little towards you so that

you can hear them and um so just remember that this is you know we've we've changed a little a few of the details here just to make it more accessible for everybody watching all right and at the end of the presentation I will give people an opportunity for questions once we've completed the the demonstration okay all right so we are going to get started and just as a reminder the asylum officer is the person sitting next to the computer the asylum seeker is the person who applied for asylum and is now having their interview good afternoon I am the asylum officer who will be interviewing how are you I'm fine thank you okay great I believe you're doing this interview stay in English right yes in English just so that you are aware you have the right to have your interview today in any language that you want as long as you bring a competent interpreter do you still wish to waive your right to an interpreter and proceed in English yes okay and you know why you're here today I am applying for asylum great the purpose of this interview today is to provide you for the opportunity to tell why you have applied for asylum I'm going to ask you a lot more questions during this interview during the interview I will be taking notes on my computer I may not always be looking at you but that does not mean that I'm not listening to everything that you are saying this interview is not being recorded which is why it is very important that you speak very slowly and in short sentences so that I can type everything that you're saying okay everything in your asylum application personal statement and supporting documents is confidential and everything you call me today during this interview is also confidential this means that none of the information or documents you provide as part of your Asylum case we'll be shared outside the US government we will not tell your home government that you have applied for asylum and we will not contact your home government to try and verify certain information about your case so please I know it can be difficult but it is very important that you tell me as many details as possible about your case and remember that it will not get back to your home government I understand if you don't understand a question that I asked please tell me so that I can ask it in a different way and if you don't know the answer to my question please just say that you don't know okay okay the interview today will be in three parts the first part is a review of your asylum application I just want to go through it with you to see if you need to make any corrections to any of the information you want to add new information the second part of the interview is when I will ask you about

why you are applying for asylum and the third part of the interview is when I will discuss with you how you will receive your decision okay all right now before we begin I need to place you under oath first please sign this oath form now this says two main things the first is that you wish to proceed in English thing the second is that you make a legal promise to tell the truth and that you understand that there could be consequences for you if you intentionally lie in order to try to get

asylum do you understand this form yes okay

and now I'm going to place you under up please stand and raise your right hand do you promise to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the church yes I do thank you you may be seated

did anyone help you prepare your asylum application no I did it by myself is

Questions begin

everything in your asylum application true and correct for the best of your knowledge yes do you have any changes to

make your Asylum application no did anyone help you prepare your personal statement or your supporting documents no I did that by myself - is everything in your personal statement true and correct to the best of your knowledge yes I see that you have submitted some

letters from people in your home country how did you obtain those letters I emailed them and asked if they would write the letters for me they did and two of them mailed the letters to me the other person was too scared to mail the letters so she just emailed it to me is everything in all of your supporting documents true and correct to the best of your knowledge yes

do you have any medical conditions that are preventing you from remembering today from remembering today let me

rephrase the question do you currently have any medical conditions that make it difficult for you to remember things oh no are you currently taking any medications that prevent you from remembering things no have you presented any fraudulent documents to the US government or a US government official no have you ever lied to the US government or a US government official yes I have can you tell me about that when I filled out my application for a US visa there was a question on the application asking if I had ever been arrested or detained I lied and said no why did you lie on that

question I had been arrested and detained by the authorities and they had threatened to do it again I was trying to escape I needed to flee my country I was afraid that if I put on my visa application that I had been arrested I would not get a visa and I would be stuck in my country and they would keep hurting me and maybe even kill me okay thank you

for being honest about that did you lie about anything else on your visa application no everything else was true did you go

to a visa interview at the u.s. embassy yes was everything you told the official during your visa interview true and correct yes it was okay it is important

Reviewing your asylum application

to remember that the asylum officer will have access to more than just your Asylum application so if you ever applied for a US visa they will have a copy of that Iza application and if you previously submitted any immigration paperwork to the US government they'll have copies of that too so if you've had encounters with US government officials at the border for example the asylum officer will also have access to those records

okay and I say this to remind everybody that remember how he took the oath in the beginning where he promised to tell the truth so everything you say during your asylum interview you said that you were going to tell the truth and intentionally which just means purposely providing false information purposely lying to the asylum officer to try and get asylum not only will the US government deny your Asylum case but they will say you know what we're not going to give you any immigrant immigration benefits in the future because you lied on your Asylum case so it's just very important to remember that okay all right let's continue okay now we are going to review your asylum application and make any necessary changes okay okay we're going to skip this part because this can take some time so the first part of the interview is where the asylum officer will review your asylum application with you it's like the first half of your asylum application I don't know if any of you have taken a look at that application it's the pages that ask what is your name where were you born what is your address list all your family members that all of these questions all the places you've worked in the past five years the schools you've attended over your life the assigned officer is just reviewing those with you to make sure that the information in your application is correct that if any changes need to be made they can make those changes at the interview it's not a big deal if you need to make changes right they happen all the time sometimes people have a baby before their asylum interview now they need to add the information about their child sometimes they have moved and now you need to put your new address sometimes you realize oh I spelled my mom's name wrong right it's fine okay you just tell the officer what the change is and the officer will make that change to your application so what we're going to do with the demonstration is we're going to sort of pretend like we've reviewed the application and we're going to move to part two of the interview which is where the asylum officer will begin asking you why are you applying for asylum great we have now reviewed your asylum application and we've made a couple of changes we added your new telephone

number and corrected the dates to attended University are there any other Corrections we need to make no that is

Signing your asylum application

all okay great please sign here to indicate these changes everything in your application

is now true all right thank you so please tell me

why you are applying for a silent I'm afraid to return to my country why are

you afraid to return I will not be safe there why will you not be safe there it

is too dangerous for me to be there okay let's pause the asylum officer is

What matters

asking the asylum seeker why are you applying for asylum has you asylum seeker given any details no right we

have no idea so remember the the first part of the application our excuse me the first part of the interview process is reviewing the application but the second part this is this is what matters okay this is the

asylum officer asking you for your story asking you what happened to you in your home country that made you have to leave and why you're afraid to go back so usually the way that this second part of

the interview begins is with the asylum officer asking you this big question tell me why you're applying for asylum

they may ask get a different way which is tell me why you had to leave your home country or they may ask it tell me

why you're afraid to return to your home country obviously these are huge questions right they're asking you about

a big important significant portion of your life the instinct that we have as people when we are asked a big question is you want to start at the beginning and and tell the person everything okay

I want you to resist the temptation to do that what's very helpful is if you

have an answer prepared to this question you will be asked this big question and

instead of starting with the beginning of your life and the asylum officer to listen to the story of who you were as a child in

every moment of your life I want you to think about being prepared with a summary that's one or two sentences that

answers this question in a very focused way that will help you stay focused on

the important details of your asylum case and will help the asylum officer also stay focused on what really matters

because we don't want either of you being distracted by other things that you might be thinking about so when

you're providing that summary of your case that overview it should include three things okay and I see a lot of you

are taking notes wonderful so the first thing it should include is what happened to you or what you are afraid will

happen to you okay and again the what is not a ten minute description of what it's simple words arrested detained attacked threatened okay the second thing is who who did

those things to you or who are you afraid would do those things to you if you had to go back to your home country

all right the third part why why do these people do these things to you or why would they do those things to you if you went back now okay so if you can practice

responding to those big questions why are you applying for asylum with a prepared one or two-sentence summary of your case that focuses on what who and why that will help keep you focused during your interview on those details of your case and it will help the officer also stay focused and the officer will keep to what is important in your case and you will keep to what is important to your case does that make sense to everybody the what do and why all right wonderful

all right we're gonna try answering this and again with that in mind please tell me why you're applying for asylum I'm afraid to return to my country because I fear being arrested detained tortured and even killed by the authorities but knows better right you have a better sense okay so we got the what we said arrested detained tortured even killed

we have the who the authorities right the government officials but we're missing something I'm missing the why right we don't know why you fears those things so let's try this one more time and we're gonna try and get all three of those into the answer all right please

tell me why you are applying for asylum I'm afraid to return to my country because I fear being arrested detained tortured and even killed by the authorities because of my political activities against the ruling party

Bravo right is everyone see how that summary just we have a clearer picture now of what this case is about the asylum officer importantly has a clear picture of what the case is about and you're both going to stay much more focused during the interview if you start the

interview with this nice clear overview all right so let's keep going were you ever physically harmed or

threatened in your country yes how many times were you physically harmed I was physically harmed five times how many times were you threatened I don't know exactly can you provide an estimate I think probably at least 10 times so

sometimes the asylum officer will ask you a question that you don't know the exact answer to and that is okay right

so what's important is to be honest with the officer if you don't know the answer to a question tell the officer you don't know and if it's a question like this where you can approximate or provide an estimate you

can work with the officer to do that so that was a perfect example of the asylum seekers saying I don't know exactly and

the officer asked well why don't you why don't give me a guess what's what's an estimate and then the asylum she could

provide an estimate okay so don't be worried if there's a situation where you

don't know exactly what time of day something happened or exactly how many people are in this room we can all guess

right okay great hey you said you were physically harmed

five times we did these five incidents occur I was at a small meeting organized

by the opposition party and we were planning our next big protest I was in

charge of creating pamphlets that listed all the terrible human rights violations

that the ruling party was doing and also explaining how our opposition party

would put an end to these abuses and hold the government officials accountable we wanted the people to join

us in standing up to the cruelty of the ruling party the authorities showed up

and beat us then arrested us and brought us to jail have we heard when no no no

Types of questions

the asylum seeker this is something that we commonly do and we're asked about something is where you think oh the

event oh you want to know about the event and we just start telling the story it's very important that we listen

to the question that the officer is asking and that that is the question that we're answering and that we're not providing all this other stuff on this

side okay so there are generally three types of questions the asylum officer will ask type 1

yes-or-no questions ok

so just answer yes or no if it's a yes or no question and if they want more information they will let you know but

you know if they say did you or did you not just say yes or no okay and then you

can provide more details when they asked second or questions like this where they're asking for specific information

when did this happen how many people were there how often did you attend

these meetings right these are asking for dates numbers frequency right not asking for the

details just the specific information the third type of question the asylum officer may ask are the ones for

descriptions right this is the time when you're prepared with all of those details so for example

if the officer asks what happened on that day or please tell me in detail about the

third time that you were attacked or please describe a jail cell that you are held in this is your opportunity to

paint that picture for the officer to really describe with lots and lots of details in response to their question so

remember to listen to the question listen to the question and answer that

question directly alright let's try this again you said that you were physically harmed five times when did these five

incidents as occur the first time was on February 3rd then I was in detention for

8 days and I was beaten on February 4th

February 5th and February 9 what year

the last time was on March 15 what year did all of these incidents take place

they all happened last year

were you ever physically harmed after March 15 no okay let's start with the

first time that you were physically harmed please describe in detail what happened
Story

I was attending a meeting organized by United for justice the main opposition party in my country I was held in the early evening of February 3rd last year at about 6:30 p.m. there were four of us there and it took place in the home of one of our members in charge of organizing events we were planning for the next big protest which would happen on March 15th the meeting had just started there was only maybe 10 or 15 minutes of formal discussion when there was suddenly a loud banging on the front door we heard loud voices yelling to open the door and that they would break it down if we didn't let them in we had closed the curtains before the meeting as a precaution so I couldn't see outside the house I didn't know how many people were outside the event organizer got up and unlocked the door and then five police officers burst inside they were holding big guns and looked very angry they were shouting at us I was immediately afraid I didn't know what they would do shouting they were all yelling at the same time and I couldn't really make out what they were saying it sounded like stay still don't move we all put our hands up because we did not want them to shoot us there was one officer I think he was the leader of the group because he spoke first he said that they were engaging in that we were engaging in activities against the government and that we had to go with them the officers then handcuffed us one by one and led us toward a large police van there were only about well four or five of us four of us and five of them so each of us was being led by an officer they were very rough with all of us I saw to my right that the officer leading one of my fellow party members was touching her aggressively on her body and I instinctively yell hey stop that is when that officer and the one who is leading me began to beat me for speaking out the officer who was leading me it means several times on the side of my head with his fists maybe three times the other officer ran at me and kicked the side of my leg and I fell down they decided that I would be separated from the other party members they told me they would teach me a lesson they put the other three party members in the police van and the officer who had been leading me put me into a smaller police car with the officer I thought was the leader of the group then they took me to the police station can you tell me about the ride from your friend's house to the police station not much happened can you please explain in detail about the ride for your friend's house to the police station well nothing really happened then all right cause they're so the asylum seeker was very detailed when when describing Details

the police entering the home right and suddenly the asylum officer is asking for details about the ride and nothing much happened so what are some details that we we would be expecting the asylum officer to include and the answer to

this question what are some things that could help tell the story of a ride in a car from one location to another

Spyros might use

great yeah whether you're restrained in the car right if you were hit again in

the car how long the drive talked right if you could if you could see where you were going yeah it was dark yeah right

if you recognized it yeah right so these details will help you

know answer the officers question about tell me about the ride this obviously stuff was happening right the answer if

nothing really happened is is not accurate and it's not helpful because every time that there's an answer that

sort of meant nothing really that makes the officer wonder if it's a true story

right if we can't give details about events when we're asked questions about

them it makes the officer wonder if we're telling the truth so the details

are very very important for you to be trusted by the officer for your story to

come alive and we need the officer to feel like they're experiencing this story with you as you tell it okay

so so let's try answering this question again with those details that everyone pointed out can you tell me about the

ride for your friend's house to the police station my head really heard from the beating it

was throbbing I was afraid I had a concussion and I didn't know what was

going to happen I was sitting in the back seat and the two officers were in

the front I was still handcuffed and might with my hands behind me so it was

very uncomfortable it was a really bumpy ride and I didn't know where they were

taking me I didn't know if they were taking me to to the same police station

as the others a different police station or some other place I tried asking where

they were taking me and the officer in the front passenger seat yelled at me to

keep quiet or else I would regret it I didn't say anything else the drive

seemed very long over an hour maybe two hours then we stopped at a police

station the same officer turned around and told me welcome to your new home

none of us were there for this fictional event but do we feel like we were kind

of in the car is the asylum-seeker the way that they're describing it right those details make the story come alive

it makes the story real and believable and it's going to have an impression on

the asylum officer when you're able to include those details when you're when you're telling these stories it's very

very important okay did you recognize the place they brought

you to no it was not the police station in my neighborhood I have never seen it

before you indicated earlier that you were detained for six days no I said

Jail cell

eight days oh that's right I apologized eight days and wherever you

determine detained during that time in a jail cell where was this cell the police

station had two floors on the ground floor in the back where the jail cells

that's that's where I was did you ever let me rephrase were you ever in the same stuff were you

in the same cell all eight days of detention yes did you ever leave this up
yes when they took me to be interrogated okay please describe in detail the jail
cell where you were detained for eight days well it was small and not very nice
can you provide any other details about the room all right we're having the same
problem right in the lack of details it it makes the story sound strange and
makes the asylum officers start to wonder if this really happened to this person the asylum
officer should be able
to picture what happened to you clearly based on your description of the event and based on
you know small and not very
nice are we able to really picture this jail cell where he was held for eight days No okay so what
are some details that
that the asylum seeker could include and the answer that would help us picture the jail cell that
he was in for eight
days great yeah were there other people in the room as you by himself right where
their window excellent and what comes with windows light right was it a dark room why excellent
the asylum officers
always ask about toilets when you're talking about detention okay what about
some other things sorry could you see outside did you eat anything great my
food and water the temperature in the room was that hot was it cold right was it smelly yeah
these are great
details great great great details let's try this again please describe in detail
the jail cell where you were detained for eight days I was in a cell all by myself it was so
small maybe well less than half the size
of this small office the floor was hard concrete and I had to sleep directly on
the floor without any blankets or a mattress when I tried to sleep I took
off my shirt and rolled it under my head like a pillow it was so hot in there and
there were no windows there was one small light hanging from the ceiling but
it was always flickering which gave me a headache there was no toilet just a
bucket in the corner I had to use that bucket the whole time I was there and it was never
emptied there were so many
flies and it smelled so dirty the walls
were all so concrete except one wall was metal bars where the door was I tried to
see through the bars but I couldn't see anything except the wall of the hall can
everyone picture this this room a lot better now right um I'm really impressed the details that
everybody threw out
they were all in here nope really great job thinking about how to describe a space that not the
other
person has experienced with you and again I just want to emphasize once again I know that
we're talking about a
jail cell and detention in a police office again asylum doesn't have to be
related to those things these examples of how to use details to describe places
and events they go to every type of case so any type of place that you're describing if it's a
public square if
it's a part if it's your own home if it's your neighborhood right all

these the same strategies apply okay it doesn't have to be a jail cell that gets this level of description in detail it's going to be any place where anything happened to you that's an important part

of your story you should think about that these these really small important details that will help the officer feel

like they're seeing it in a movie okay all right let's you play you said earlier that you were taken out of yourself to be interrogated where did they take you to be interrogated a room upstairs on the second floor how many times did they take you to be interrogated there three times on which Interrogation

day were you interrogated during your attention well I was put in the cell the evening of February 3rd the first interrogation was the next day February 4th I was interrogated again the day after that February 5th then they just left me in the cell all by myself for a few days the last interrogation was on February 9th were you always interrogated in the same room yes please describe the room where you were interrogated it was bigger than the cell there was a police officer sitting at a metal desk and there was a folder with papers in it on the desk there was a metal chair in the room they told me to sit there two other police officers were standing in the back corner when I was brought in there were no windows but the lights were very bright and what happened during the first interrogation they maybe sit on the chair and then the officer sitting at the desk said he knew everything about me and what my friends and I were trying to do he said if you give me what I want I can make sure your punishment is less what do you want he wanted me to give information about the other party members organizers and supporters he asked for all their names he wanted to know how we got our funding if we worked with foreign governments how did we share information about our protests who printed the pamphlets who wrote them these kinds of questions did he ask you anything else he wanted me to tell him everything and he wanted me he wanted to know how our opposition party operated how we organized how we spread information how we got our funding anything else no how did you answer

these questions I told him I didn't know anything I said it was my first meeting and the other people didn't tell me anything before the police came and arrested US he said I was lying and that's when the the

beatings began how do you beat I they

okay take your time you can continue when you're ready

all right let's pause with the asylum seeker in this moment there will probably be moments during your

Pause

interview when you feel overwhelmed emotionally having to talk about these moments that we don't like to think about because they're scary they're painful they were some of the worst

moments of our lives and now we're being asked to tell that story to someone we've just met it's not it's not easy

but it's okay to feel nervous about it and it's okay to be uncomfortable with doing that remember that the asylum office is not a place of detention the asylum interview is not an interrogation okay

the asylum officer cannot keep you there they cannot make you answer questions they can't force you to stay in that room you have the power to leave if you want to okay so even if you're feeling overwhelmed remind yourself that you're in charge in the room right you chose to be there and you can choose to leave and sometimes just remembering that allows us to feel like I can do this right just giving that moment to remind yourself that this person doesn't have the power to keep you here that can be very very helpful

sometimes just poppin taking some deep breaths that can get you refocused and re centered and ready to start talking about these things the asylum office is a safe place to tell your story in the beginning of the interview you'll remember the asylum officer was telling you asylum seeker that nothing that you tell me today will be shared with your government it's very important to remember and to believe that that is true the US government will not start contacting your government to verify anything that you've told us they won't start contacting your family members to verify anything only to people that send letters or testimony as part of your case are going to be involved nobody else so you need to feel you need to trust that and I know it's very very hard to trust any government it's hard to trust the US government I understand

but in order for this process to work for you you do need to believe that what you say will stay with the US government because if you start being concerned that sharing information and sharing details and answering questions could potentially put people that you love back home in danger now you're at risk of the asylum officer not believing your case not feeling comfortable granting your case if you're not answering questions okay and if you have those concerns feel free to share them with the officer and you can you can tell the officer why why you're nervous about answering a certain question they are trained to be able to discuss this with you and to reassure you all right does this make sense to everybody

okay great all right

okay I'm ready okay

please tell me problems repeating the main officer gave some kind of signal with his hand the two guys and to the two guys in the corner they came towards me one guy grabbed my hair and pulled my head back and the other guy slapped me across the face at this time I was not in handcuffs those two officers then tied my arms down against my side zip to the sides of the chair and then they pulled hard rubber batons out and their belts and began beating me

all over my body where on your body did they hit you with a batons here and in here and and also
here I remember the asylum interview is not being recorded with a video camera
it's all it's only going to be the notes that the asylum officer takes on the computer so if you're
eating the notes
and they say I was beaten here here here here do we know what that is in
reference to we have any idea no you have to say body parts when you point to
them you can't say it looked like that describe what you're saying okay we want
it to be something that someone who's not watching it isn't able to understand because once the
asylum officer is done
conducting the interview what they do is they type up a summary and they share it with their
supervisor and use and the
supervisors they do look at the summaries and we want the supervisor to be able to you know
understand what the
asylum seeker was saying during the interview and if it's here here there like this like that that's
going to
didn't hook be very helpful right for the supervisor or for the asylum officer during the inner
all right so let's try that again actually labeling the body parts where
are your body that they hate you with the batons across both my arms in
both my legs my stomach and my sides how
long's beating laugh I don't know exactly several minutes it
felt like it lasted forever I was in so much pain I didn't know when it was
going to stop each time I cried out in pain they hit me even harder did they
say anything while they were getting it they said I was a traitor and I was
betraying my country and my people they said they had ways of making me
talk that they would make me tell them what they wanted to know I just kept
saying that I didn't know anything and they just kept beating me and you said earlier that you
were brought to this
same room to be interrogated on three occasions during your detention correct
yes were you beaten on the other two occasions please answer yes or no I'm
sorry yes during the other two interrogations the officers asked you
the same questions or did they ask you for other information the questions were always the
same they just kept asking
for information about our opposition party who were the members and supporters how we were
organized where
we got our funding did you give them the same responses as the first
interrogation yes I kept repeating that I was brand-new to the party and I did
not know anything and beatings during the second interrogation
were they the same kind of beatings if the officers harm you in any different
ways no the beatings were pretty much the same as the first time they hurt a
lot more though because I was already so sore from the first time and now that we're hitting my
my bruises so the pain
was more intense I I think they enjoyed that because I I saw him smiling at each
other when I screamed in pain and the

third interrogation that also included some a similar beating actually the third time was a bit different the officers beat me in the same ways as the first two times but they they also poured a bucket of very cold water over my face one guy held my head back and the other guys poured the water on my face the water was going off my nose and into my mouth I couldn't breathe it felt like I was drowning it was the most the most terrifying part of my experience there thank you when you're not being interrogated nikitin how did you spend your time during those eight days in detention there wasn't anything to do I just I just waited for the next interrogation but you were in detention for eight days it's quite a long time can you provide more details about how you spent the days in there there was nothing to do there I didn't do anything so of course the options are limited eight days in a small jail cell but this is still a common question that Asylum officers will ask if you spent a period of time in one place whether it was a detention or if you're in a safe house or if you were hiding in your own home anything where you spent time that obviously is going to be a lot of time spent doing nothing you were still doing things right doing nothing that's not possible for eight days so so let's think more about what are some things that perhaps we could use to answer this question better other than just I didn't do anything so what sort of things would we expect to be in an answer for how someone spent time for eight days in a small room sufferings to detune okay yeah so what your what your physical pain was like thinking that's a huge one right that's a lot of what we do when we're not doing anything physically is what are we thinking about pray sure if you are praying absolutely how many how many times right how often how often were you brought food in water okay whether you're able to shower change your clothes right did you interact with other people did you do people ever enter that room that you were in did you see anyone walk by that you got to talk to what's something that we all do over an eight day period when we're not awake we are exactly sleeping how can he sleep right how often was he able to sleep was he having nightmares was he was he in so much pain from the bruises covering his body that he was wasn't even able to fall asleep okay so these there are things happening even when you're not doing anything right and these are the sorts of details again that are going to make your story come alive for the officer for the officers to be able to feel like they are sort of reliving this with you in a way that they can understand because they weren't there you are the only expert in your story and I want you all to really feel strong and confident about that yes it can feel lonely to be

the only one who's capable of telling your story but it gives you a power no one else in the world has okay and I want you to feel that that is something that is to your advantage you are the one that can share these details with someone who wasn't there you can educate them about what it was like to be in a room for eight days when they've had no idea and I'll tell you right now the asylum officers they haven't gone through what you went through okay they need you to tell them what it was like they have an experience that and all of our experiences are our individual personal experiences that are our own and we don't have the same stories we haven't lived the same lives but what we are capable of doing is communicating to one another and being able to use details and emotions so that someone else can understand a little bit what that must have been like and the emotions are so important I know we're not focusing on that today in this performance because that's really not my objective here but Asylum when it comes down to it is about fear and if you are not able to express your fear to the officer and again this is this goes to safety and feeling comfortable in that room but if you can push yourself to trust that the officer is somebody that can safely and securely accept your fear and not use it to hurt you that would be the most powerful thing that you do that they have your interview is to trust that person and I know for a lot of people in this room and most everyone who goes through an asylum interview trusting other people because of the experiences that led you to apply for asylum is at the bottom of your list of things that you have any interest in doing but for the asylum interview you should make it one of your top priorities that day be courageous be confident and walk out of that room knowing that you pushed yourself to do something that you didn't think you were able to do but once you do it you're going to feel lighter you're going to feel stronger and you're going to not regret not feeling like okay one of the ways to practice that is if you feel safe and comfortable trusting another person to just share your story telling one other person and knowing that you can tell somebody and it won't break you it won't destroy you you are still in charge of your life and that you still have the power to tell your story that is going to make you so much more confident for the asylum interview all right yes yes all right I just so extraordinary what you're saying and to say it from a from every point of view of human point of view no I just in light of the question just prior when you're asking about details I wonder if it's helpful to suggest as a signpost that sometimes it's good just to really think about your senses what you hear

what you see what you maybe taste what you feel you know just like as a signpost for details it's just sometimes

it a quick way it is like absolutely check in with your senses absolutely for the details just to suggest I think that's great I think that's that's you know those the details that we were giving those are they do go down to sentences that's a great way to if your type of person who thinks that way that's very helpful yeah okay all right

when you are not being interrogated to the beaten how did you spend your time during those eight days in detention

well the time seemed to move so slowly in there I was in pain from the beatings and covered in bruises my whole body ached - the whole time I

was into tension Michael's my cell was becoming more filthy every day since they never changed changed out the bucket i I used as a toilet I was never allowed to shower I abhorred the same clothes the entire time I was there the same clothes I had on when they first

arrested me there was no mattress or pillow for me to sleep on so I I rolled up my shirt and I used it as a pillow lying on that hard floor made made the pain worse there was nothing I could do from my pain they did not give me any painkillers or ointments I just had to wait for everything to heal they they only fed me once a day and the food was very bad it was bland and dirty and I found small bugs in the food a few times they gave me one small bottle of water every morning and I I had to drink it

slowly for it to last the whole day I spent most of my time just thinking there was no one for me to talk to so I was just I was completely alone with my thoughts I thought about how they had tortured me and I wondered when they would torture me again and whether they would torture me in different ways I

wondered if I would ever be released if that I would ever see my family again

I wondered if anyone knew where I was that's that's what I did

why were you finally released I don't know they didn't tell me they just came and they got me from the cell and I thought they were taking me for another interrogation but they took me to the

front of the room of the police station and they told me they were letting me go did they have you sign any documents

before you were released no do you have any record of this arrest and detention

no they they didn't give me anything did they say anything to you when they released you they warned that if I continue to participate in any activities for the opposition party or

did anything else to betray my country and go against the government they would arrest me again they said that the next

time not be so easy and they would put me in prison for a very long time and my family would have no idea where I was did they say anything else to you just that the personal statement that you submitted says that when you were being

released they told you you had to promise to remain loyal to the ruling party yes but just now when I asked you

what they said to you you did not mention that is there a reason that you didn't include that I mean they they told me many things that was one of them they also said they just said they would imprison me if I betrayed the country or opposed the government I just wanted to get out of there and go back home I I was in so much pain from all the torture and I had not slept well or eaten clean food the entire time and I just wanted

to go home okay did you seek medical attention after you were released

no why not I did not want to tell any doctor what happened to me because it would be like I was telling the unlit to telling on the government like I was going against them the government has a

lot of informants across the society including in the hospitals to inform on people like me who are a part of the

Opposition I was afraid that the authorities would retaliate against me for seeking medical care did you care for your injuries and in the other way I had painkillers at home I took I took those I also had some ointment to soothe the pain and my body did you continue to participate and political activities against the government yes but I was too afraid to attend meetings in person so I communicate with the other party members

through encrypted emails did you have any other encounters with authorities

after this time yes at the protest on March 15th where did this protest take place in Freedom Square the main square outside the government building in the capital city how many people were at

this protest I would say there were about 5,000 people there that day were they all this where yes that's where the protest was we met there at 11:11 a.m. and we're going to start marching to the

presidential palace at noon were there any protests in your country any other protests in your country that day no there was only just the one my research shows that there were at least three smaller protests outside the capital city that day oh yes I'm sorry I

thought you had asked if I'd gone to any other protest that day okay

did you know about the other protest planet for that same day yes of our opposition party had smaller organized groups in the more rural areas of the country and they they had also organized

protests for the same afternoon what did you do at the protest I passed out the pamphlets I had made and I thanked the protesters for coming to show their support for human rights and democracy

I talked to protesters about why it was so important to oppose the government because of all the terrible things they

they did to our people just just to stay rich and in power did you do anything else that that's everything I did in the square once the March started at noon I helped to lead the protests and chant protesters and chants we chanted we want democracy no more government torture where are the political prisoners did

the protest ever become violent it was a peaceful protest and the March was also peaceful we were not there to commit any violence and we never called for any violence please listen to my question

the protest ever become violent yes by the authorities what happened we had been marching maybe about a half an hour it was supposed to take about 45 minutes to an hour for us to reach the presidential palace since we were so many people and moving so slowly but after half an hour the riot police showed up in vans they did not even give us a chance to turn back they just started attacking the protesters I saw people being hit with batons and kicked by the riot police the riot police were wearing gas masks so I knew there could be tear gas it all happened so fast the tear gas canisters were thrown into the crowd and everyone is screaming and trying to run away from the gas

I saw a protester on the ground being kicked by two riot police I yelled at them to leave her alone and I tried to get to her to help but there were too many protestors between us and there was just too much panic and chaos were you physically harmed during this protest yes I was trying to get away from the tear gas and my eyes and throat were burning I was coughing and felt like I was going to throw up it was so hard to move anywhere because everyone around me was in the same state and trying to flee and panic was complete chaos suddenly I felt something hard hit me in my lower back and then behind my knee I fell to the ground and the hits kept coming to my back I tried to cover my head to protect myself you see

it's hitting you yes it was one of the riot police did that person say anything while they were getting you he was yelling this is what happens to rats like you yours you're so ungrateful we give you everything you could ever need and you keep demanding more you don't deserve to live and he kept hitting me while he was while I was on the ground how did you manage to get out of the situation he eventually stopped beating me and then I was helped to my feet by two other protesters they said they didn't want me to get trampled in the chaos they they asked if I was okay I was in so much pain and was still barely able to see them from the tear gas they kept me up holding me under my arms and helped me get out of the crowd and into the grass on them on the other side and I sat down I waited there until I was in better shape and then I spent the next 15 to 20 minutes trying to find my my colleagues did you find any of them I found two and we tried to find more together but couldn't the riot police had not left they were arresting protesters we decided it was best if we all went to our safe house and stayed inside for the rest of the day to try to avoid being arrested did you go home I

did not go to my home because I was afraid the police would come looking for me there I went with my two colleagues to one of the safe houses the opposition party had for situations like this I stayed there for the next month and a half I heard that the police had gone to my house looking for me the day of the protest they knew I was an organizer of the protest in' and that i've been there and they were going to take me that they were going to take me away how do you know that that information was shared with me by one of my neighbors that I trust who sent me an encrypted message over email she told me it was not safe for me to come home when did you leave your country on May 2nd when did you apply for a US visa hi I applied for it after I was released from detention I I think it was the second week of February and when was your visa granted the beginning of March I think the first week of March so you obtained your US visa before you which the protests on March 15 why did you not leave at that time why did you attend the protest it was it was very important to me that I attend the protest we've been planning it for several months and it was going to be the biggest demonstration against the government we ever had I knew it was a risk but the decision to leave my country and leave behind all my friends and family and everything I knew was a very big decision and I was not quite ready to make it at that time I needed to go to this protest first I could not abandon my colleagues and all we have worked for I just I just needed to do it for the future of my country ok and when you did leave did you have any problems leaving I was afraid that I would have problems so I hired a broker to help me get through security at the airport and bribe the officials to let me through without issues I'm not proud of this but I believed it was the only way I could escape with my life I had not left the safe house that entire time not until I left for the airport I did not know when I would ever see my country again so you didn't experience any problems when you were leaving no I got through it you return to your home country now what do you fear would happen to you this question sound familiar yeah big question alright let's remember what are the three things we want to include in our answer to those big questions why perfect all right I if I returned I'm afraid that I wouldn't even make it out of the airport the authorities would know who I was because they arrested me before for my political activities and we're trying to arrest me again after the protest I believe they would arrest

me again and imprison me interrogate me torture me I'm afraid I would be disappeared and no one would be able to find out where I was I could even be killed they do whatever they want to

opponents of the government do you think that there is another part of your country that you could live in safely definitely not the authorities share information about political opponent opponents and there are informants all across the country I don't think there's anywhere I could stay where it was safe for me even if I managed to get out the airport safely where would I go

I would have to live in hiding like I did in the safe house only this time I could never leave what kind of life is that and all because they want to punish me for trying to use peaceful means to bring democracy to my country okay I believe I understand your case did you understand all of the questions yes is there anything that we did not discuss today that you would like to tell me no I have told you all the most important details so at the end of the interview the officer will usually ask you if there's anything else you would like to add you don't have to add anything you may just be so utterly exhausted and you're just ready to leave and be done with it it's fine to say no thank you

okay if there's something really really important about your case that you did not have the opportunity to talk about by all means let the officer know you know I would like to talk about this

this one attack that we didn't discuss today sometimes the officer will say all right let's talk about that but sometimes the officer will say you know what I didn't ask about that because you know I read your statement and I read all your supporting documents and I wanted to focus on some of the other events today okay but if there is something really important that you want to raise with the officer go ahead and do that for some people the end of the interview and being asked if there's anything else that you want to say can actually be a very therapeutic moment for them it is the one time of the interview where you're not responding to a question that the officer is asking but you're actually speaking to the officer from one human being to another and you're able to in a short you know don't go talking for 20 minutes but in a short time you do have an opportunity to remind the officer who you are as a person what this means to you to be going through this process what the idea of asylum represents to you and just be able to you know emphasize that you are not just another case right that you you are a person your story is your life this is more than just the file they have sitting in front of them for a lot of people that can bring closure and it can make you walk out of the room feeling really really strong about your entire case being over on your terms but again you don't have to say anything if you

don't want to okay okay okay now I just have to ask you a series of questions that I ask every asylum-seeker these questions are not personal to you or to your case they're all yes or no questions okay have you ever lived in or traveled to any of any country other than your home country or the United States no have you requested asylum or refugee status in any country other than the United States no have you ever held an official government position no have you ever served in any military police or law enforcement agency no have you ever been a member of a group that engages in terrorist activities no have you ever been arrested or detained anywhere in the world for any reason no are we all kind of remove yes the answer is yes it's not a it's not a trick question the entire story is about being arrested and detained this list of questions at the end as the asylum officer said this is a script and they go through it at the end of every single interview it's not about you thought about your case what country you're from they have to ask you these questions one of those questions is have you ever been arrested in detain so if your story involves being arrested or detained and you just told that story there's no need to say no because you just want to get out of there and answer no to all these questions the answer is yes right sometimes the asylum officer will ask it a little bit differently and they'll say other than what we've discussed today have you ever been arrested or detained any other times right then the answer could be no assuming that those are the only times if your answer to any of these other questions is yes that doesn't necessarily mean there's a problem okay so the first question she asked have you ever lived in or travelled to any other countries if you were on vacation a couple places or you lived in another place for her a brief time that could be fine okay this is the least any of these questions at the end that she's practicing now that you would answer yes to that's a really good reason to try and have a legal consultation because depending on why your answer is yes or what more facts are about that answer that is something that you might want to speak with an attorney about before before your interview okay it doesn't necessarily mean there's a problem for example there's a lot of countries where you are required to undergo military service and that does include weapons training okay so a lot of asylum seekers the answer to have you ever served in the military yes a lot of asylum seekers have you ever received weapons training is yes and they can still get asylum but it's just something that if any of these answers as your serve going through your

own lives and response to these questions is yes it's a good reason to maybe try and set up a legal consultation okay all right let's see
have you ever been arrested or detained anywhere in the world for any reason
yes how many times have you been arrested or detained in total anywhere in the world just the one time I told
you about today okay have you ever committed a crime that you
were not arrested for no do you intend to commit any activities in the United States that are illegal no okay that concludes this asylum interview thank
you for sharing your story with me today thank you you will not get your decision today the decision will take at least two weeks and it may take longer please
return to this office in two weeks to pick up the decision if our office needs any more time to make a decision we will notify you and you do not need to come back in two weeks we will then send the decision in
the mail do you have any questions about this no okay we can leave no thank you
again and thank you