

Center for the Victims of Torture

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.cvt.org/what-we-do/survivor-stories/angelique%E2%80%99s-story>

Campaign and Advocacy

A health worker back home, Angelique became a refugee after surviving sexual violence and loss.

Angelique* was a health specialist working at a hospital in Burundi, doing well for herself, before she was forced to flee the country with her two children and her brother. Her brother became a target after witnessing the murder of a high-ranking government official. The family started their new lives in Kenya and had seemingly adjusted to refugee life in Nairobi when Angelique's brother mysteriously disappeared.

She searched for him everywhere. She even went back to Burundi to see if she could find him. She traveled with her then five-year-old son, Jean. While she was in Burundi, a group of men looking for her brother found out where she was, attacked and gang raped her. She was forced to flee the country yet again, this time pregnant from the rape.

Today, Angelique is struggling to take care of her three children, now 11, seven and four. Her brother is still missing. She hawks *mandazi* (a Kenyan doughnut-like pastry) in Nairobi's central business district to make ends meet. She recalled a time when her older son read in a newspaper that there were government vacancies for health workers. He remembered that I was college-educated and that it was in something health-related, she said, smiling. What he doesn't understand is that I studied in French in my country, and of course I did not come to Kenya with any of my certificates when we fled. He doesn't understand why I'm working in a lowly job hawking pastries, why we were sometimes late with the rent and struggling when I could be a doctor, she said.

Nevertheless, this is not the end of the story for Angelique. As part of CVT Nairobi's counseling, the session that covers loss subsequently explores the new meaning survivors of war trauma and torture can create for themselves after experiencing indescribable atrocities.

Though the struggle to keep her family afloat continues, Angelique is proud of herself for finding the strength to carry on, and for learning new skills, like braiding hair and cultivating an entrepreneurial spirit that she didn't have prior to these experiences. I didn't know that I could do all the things I've had to do in order to take care of my family, she says. I'm proud of the fact that I can work hard with my hands to ensure that my children go to school, meet their basic needs and also look back on how far we've come.

**Name has been changed for security and confidentiality.*

Photo by Dreamstime.



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