



## **Recap of Fatmata's killing**

On 19/04/2023, Fatmata, a 23-year-old woman living in one of the refugee camps Second Tree works in, was shot and killed by a border police officer in North Macedonia. Her husband, Abu Bakar, was with her when she died and witnessed the events.

He asked to get in the ambulance with her but was told there was no room for him and that they would take him in a police car. Instead, when he got into the car, they drove him to a detention centre, and he couldn't say goodbye to her. After spending a day and a half in a cell, without any news of his wife, the police offered Abu to forget everything and be dropped at the border to "get to Europe".

Abu Bakar refused and decided to seek justice for Fatmata. It was at this moment that he got in touch with us: "I am completely alone, you are the only ones I trust, please come". Since then, our team has been in North Macedonia, working on the legal case, liaising with Fatmata's family, supporting Abu Bakar, as well as reaching out to media, institutions, and anyone who could help.

We had some remarkable successes: mainly getting the policeman on trial, and bringing Fatmata's body home in Sierra Leone. The case gathered lots of attention: the European Parliament submitted a Parliamentary Interrogation about Fatmata's killing, OSCE is currently monitoring the trial. International news outlets reported on the case. Even Pope Francis wrote a letter to Abu Bakar to express his condolences and closeness.

## **The legal case**

In April, the possibility of a migrant taking to trial a policeman defended by the Ministry of Interior seemed extremely unlikely, as virtually all other cases of violence against migrants had gone unpunished. However, thanks to institutional and media attention, and the work of two local lawyers, the case was scaled up to the higher office of the Public Prosecutor, who did a real investigation and then pressed charges.

The trial is ongoing, Abu Bakar is present at all hearings and has testified as a witness. He, Fatmata's mother, and two sisters are registered as damaged parties in the trial. Second Tree, with the support of two local lawyers, will continue to follow the legal case, update media and institutions on the developments, and support Fatmata's family with the outcome of the trial (for example, filing a European Court for Human Rights appeal, in case the policeman is acquitted).

However, in many conversations we've had with Abu Bakar and Fatmata's family, another question came up: besides the trial in North Macedonia, can Fatmata's story be used as a force for good?

## **Fatmata as a symbol**

Can Fatmata's killing, her story, become a tool to prevent stories like this from happening again? The case has already received a lot of attention, which could be used for the larger cause. The cruelty of what happened with Fatmata is the epitome of what's wrong with how migration is handled. We are surrounded by



migrants' deaths, but this is the first time we hear of a migrant who is shot and killed, with no wrongdoing alleged, by border police.

Also, it shouldn't count anything, but it probably does: Fatmata was a woman; she was 23; she was most evidently a threat to no one; there are many videos, voice recordings, and pictures of her that make it difficult to reduce her to a number. There is also a survivor, Abu Bakar, and a family who are eager to speak and fight for her memory.

Can her death produce something meaningful and help others? This is what Abu Bakar and Fatmata's family resolutely want. They have told us very convincingly that they want her to be remembered and for her legacy to do something good. They said: "We will never have her back, but we want to prevent other families from experiencing the same tragedy we experienced."

Second Tree got involved in this case because we don't abandon people in our community like Fatmata and Abu Bakar, and we will support Abu throughout the legal case and his future. However, this is an area in which we have no experience or expertise: are we right in seeing potential in this?

### **Fatmata's legacy**

We are looking for people with more knowledge and resources than us who would be interested in taking over the global part of Fatmata's story, and we would be happy to connect them with Abu Bakar and Fatmata's family, who have expressed this desire.

This kind of endeavour could take many forms: a Fatmata foundation, a fund, a project, a media product, a documentary, even a prize or an academic recognition. Many of us have attended, and spoken at, conferences on antimigration sentiments, cruelty at borders, and the systemic violence of European policies. However, if Abu Bakar is the speaker and can say, "they shot and killed my wife", "that is the result of these policies", that would be much more powerful.

The family has mentioned many potential avenues for this new venture, which could be named after Fatmata: lobbying at the European or national level for better policies, giving talks in schools and universities, speaking at events, training social workers, etc. However, this should be something that the people who would be interested in taking over this endeavour would decide alongside Abu Bakar and Fatmata's family.

Our nightmare is that in 5 or 10 years, someone will come to us and say: "You had access to this powerful story that we could use to do something very positive, and I never learned that there was this opportunity".