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Liban's friend and supporter Françoise Ramel

Françoise: My name is Françoise Ramel, I live in Pontivy since a long, long time. I am elected, and I am here to answer to your questions, for your questions.

Elaine: What I'd like to know, Françoise, is how, when and where you met Liban.

Françoise : Liban __ is my neighbour, he lives in my street, probably we could not meet each other, because life is like this. He is a refugee, I am elected, but before he arrive there, I met other refugees in this house, in his house, young man, younger people from south of Sudan and it was my first contact with refugee in my street, and yes, I want him to know what was the story. It was difficult because they can't speak French, also they can't speak English, and when I have the opportunity to meet Liban, I go to the house to see my friends from South Sudan. They were gone, because refugees arrive in Pontivy, and then they go in other cities, and there was a lot of men in this house, and the only who can speak English was Liban. But, we don't meet this first day, but after in the street it was easier to say, "Hello, how are you?"

Elaine: So how did he get legal status here? I believe that's quite recent.

Françoise: The legal statute is "demandeur d'asile." First, he went to, he arrived with Libya and so on in Italy. He wanted direct come into France, but it was a long, long, long way. He stay 14 months in Germany, and in Germany they don't, they give him work, he could work, he has everything, but he can't get a legal status. That's why he escaped from Germany after 14 months, because he was afraid if police catch him, he goes back to Italy, because of this European strange politics about refugee. So, he decided to escape and symbolic, perhaps, he arrived in France, first January this year, and it was difficult, but he succeed to arrive to Paris. It was very, very difficult. He succeed to arrive in Paris. In Paris he got a lot of chance, a lot of chance. The government give him a "normal" status. "Normal" means whatever happens to you, Liban __, you never come back to Germany or to Italy. And, that's enough for him. He say, "I want to stay in that country. Tell me what you want: yes or no, but I want to stay in that country." And since 1 January, he has a processus of "demand d'asile" and we are waiting now to the answer of the government about he can stay or not.

Elaine: So I understand that you went to, was it, to Vannes recently?

Françoise : Yes, one month ago he was in Paris, I was with him, because it's difficult for a young man who can't speak French to get in Paris and to find the way to go to this important rendez-vous in OFPRA. OFPRA is the name of the institution who receives the refugees to say them, "yes, you can stay" or "no, you have to go away." It's difficult, non, as human? So, one month ago, he was there, and Friday I drive him in Vannes, to prefecture. It is also difficult to get this paper, but we get this paper, so today, Liban __ is a young man who can work in France, after nine month interdiction to work.

Also, Liban comes from a country with civil war. It's a young man with "idéal." He understands the world through his experience as a young man from the forest in Somalie who never know a government. So, when he meet a government, this young man, he dream from Angela Merkel, he dream of Emmanuel Macron, he thinks of as example, and he can't understand if he drives this country, as he tell me, Liban, he says, "all these young people come in from Africa, it's good for you because it's energy, it's motivation. I

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don't understand. We're just here on beds and waiting for what?" And sometimes he's disappointed, you know. Sometimes he come and he say, "Françoise, I go to England, because I speak English, I speak English. Why I stay in France? I don't understand. It's easier for me to go to America like my friend that goes to England." Yesterday he tell me he has a friend in Calais waiting to go to England, and I tell him, "Tell them to come in Pontivy. We need these people. Tell them." He says, "No, they don't want to come to Pontivy. They don't want to stay in France." They ask, I say Liban, tell your friend you're happy here, you like to live here. He say, "Yes, for me, it's OK, but for these people, there's no advantages in France."

I want to tell you you something, Elaine, today, because I'm shocked with a lot of things Liban tells me. I can't tell you everything and also, it's Liban to tell you own story, not for me to tell that. But, I want to tell something. Liban saves the life in Germany for a little girl four years old. Liban doesn't know to swim. Also, Liban doesn't know how he's alive. He should die in the Méditerranée. Also, he wanted to die there. But, his body, he's young, he's strong, he can swim three hours in the Méditerranée, but he never learned to swim. He learned in Pontivy. Now he swim good. But, in Germany, this young man, he doesn't know to swim, he see a young girl, a little girl in danger of death, he don't think one second, he go in the water, he saves this little girl. What the family says, what the people, the German people who was there with Liban? Danke schön. For me, it's a tragedy. For me, it's a tragedy. If you can't recognise in one person, his humanity, his courage, his abnegation--I don't know--it's abnegation, when your life have no price, but the life of another one has price for you, you don't know this little girl, he saves this little girl. So, I'm, really, as European citizen, I shame, I shame. And that's why I do my best for this man, and I will do my best for another man and another woman who has a lot of humanity. Liban saves lives on the travel from Somalie 'til Pontivy. Somalie-Pontivy, for a bird, it's 7,000 kilometres, for a bird--direct--7,000 kilometres. We make a lot of kilometres in our lives, because we have cars,

Elaine: Of course --

Françoise: -- because we have televisions--we have everything.

Elaine: We take it for granted.

Françoise: I want to go to Sahara, I go from 3 o'clock in the morning; in the evening I am [in the] Sahara, and I have good time in Sahara. These, all the people who leave their country because of wars, they travel in bad conditions. They don't have to eat, they don't have to drink. They are humiliated. There is a lot of sadism. The people who make business with all of these lives are criminals, are real criminals.

Elaine: Corrupt, what they are; it's corrupt.

Françoise: Yes.

Elaine: They take their money and promise them that they will --

Françoise: They take the money, they take the woman. They take the lives. Everybody have power, like Nazis about Jews. They have power of life of everybody. And if they need to get a little excitation, they kill. That's enough. So we should shame the way we receive these people. We should shame, because I never survive this travel. I know that. Also, I never survive what he meet in Paris. The first contact with

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Paris was policeman, gazage, gaz lacrymogène [tear gas] in eyes. He sleep outside with snow on him. That was the 1st of January. This year in Pontivy, next year, 1 January 2019 for Liban will be in Pontivy, his first birthday, French birthday and we have already a lot of friends and we will be together to be with Liban and say "joyous anniversaire, Liban. You're welcome. This is your country. Whatever the government tell you, this is your country, if you decide it is your new life. And we are your new family," because Liban has lose everything in Somalie.

Elaine: I know, yes. Thank you very much, Françoise, for telling your side of Liban's story. It's very, very interesting and thank you for all the support and help.

Transcribed by Jane Crisler
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References:

OPPRA: <https://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/fr/l-ofpra/presentation-generale>