

## **Week 2, Case Description – The Case of Atah**

Atah is the son of a high-profile politician in the state of Alfania. His father ran for the presidential election in 2005, the last Alfania election cycle. He stood as leader of the opposition, the Alfania Liberation Party (ALP). During the campaign, there were mass demonstrations in which Atah and his fellow students from the National University of Alfania in the North of the country attended. He was not affiliated to his father's party, however, he decided to take part in the demonstrations to protest the authoritarian turn of the Alfania government.

The Alfania People's Party (APP) had been in power for the last 40 years, since Alfania gained its independence. The Party has been the subject of frequent allegations of corruption and abuse of power. APP leaders have never permitted independent election, observers despite suspicions that electoral results are manipulated. During the 2015 electoral campaign, demonstrations were countered by both the police and the army. At first, police used moderate force against demonstrators, but detained people frequently. There were reports of forced disappearances, including several of Atah's friends. After several weeks, the government sent the army and confrontations became increasingly violent until full descent into chaos. The army reportedly 'shoots to kill' indiscriminately against masses of unarmed demonstrators. Atah's father was killed in this gunfire whilst leading a demonstration in the capital.

The country is now immersed in a civil war, simultaneously impoverishing the country tremendously. Several factions are in conflict, including in civilian populated areas. Part of the army continues to support the APP government, whilst others split to form a resistance group in support of the ALP. In addition, an organised para-military group in the Northern state of Alfania has escalated their demands for independence, where Atah used to live. Fighting is particularly active in some of the Southern provinces of Alfania, where most ALP supporters live, and around the capital in the centre of the country, where the ALP's headquarters are located.

This division coincides roughly with the pre-colonial territories of Alfania. Yet, divisions are not perfect and some people are being targeted by members of other ethnic groups. Atah himself is a member of the Otvo people, constituting the majority of the Southern population of Alfania. He was threatened by militia groups from the Voto minority, which controls the Northern section of the country and considers members of the ALP as enemies of the self-proclaimed Republic of Votostan.

Atah's family lives in the South of Alfania, but they have written to him warning of the dangers that a journey to the South would entail. They fear that Atah may be caught in the crossfire of the battles in the centre of the country. So, he initially decided to stay in the North. After being detained twice by members of the militia, he decided to flee. The first detention lasted only a couple of hours, but the second took several days. He does not remember the exact length, as he was held 'incomunicado', in a small room without windows. He was not physically beaten but was deprived of sleep and food, losing consciousness several times and then force fed by tube afterwards. He managed to escape after bribing one of his captors.