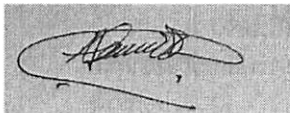


Declaration of Mwenda Watata

1. My name is Mwenda Watata. I was born in Mboko in the Democratic Republic of Congo on January 20, 1956.
2. I have eleven children. I have eight biological sons, two biological daughters, and my son John Feruzi. In terms of defining family, I have always seen John as my own son.
3. I don't know the exact day and month that John was born, but it was in 1995. To my knowledge, he is listed as 21 years old on official paperwork.
4. John is the biological son of my younger brother, who is now deceased.
5. When John was just about one month old, my younger brother left him with me. Cholera was rampant during this time. Many people died from it. My younger brother and his wife died, too. John came to live with us. My wife, Njasa Sasi, had just had a baby about a month ago, too. They were around the same age. We think they might even be just a few days apart.
6. My wife breastfed them together. It was as if she had given birth to two babies. We raised them together. We raised them as both our children. We treated them both exactly the same.
7. My role as a father was the same with all my children. I never discriminated or treated my children differently from one another. Two of my biological children have a different mom than Njasa. I loved them all the same. John is my child. He is my son.
8. I just never saw the need to legally adopt John. He was our son. He didn't know his biological mother and father. My wife breastfed him just as she did with his brother. We raised them together. He has never lived with anyone else except us.
9. I also didn't see the need to adopt him because that is just not necessary in our culture. In our cultural tradition, these distinctions between family aren't important. We're related by blood. We're a family. If someone passes away, you take care of their children. Their children become your children. My brother's son became my son. I raised John since he was a baby. He is my child. I was and am responsible for him. There is just no need to legally adopt in our culture.
10. In 2009, we were attacked by Congo soldiers outside our home. They wanted to take my life. So we had to flee. We eventually reached Malawi and in or around October 2009, we applied for refugee status there.
11. Throughout our life in the DRC and Malawi, I have never left anyone behind, even when we had to flee. It was very important to me to keep the family together. That includes my son John.
12. I just can't understand why John was made to stay behind. I truly don't understand. We went through every step of process together, fingerprints, photos, interviews. To my understanding John was being considered our child throughout the process, even legally he is my nephew. This never came up as a problem during the interviews. Nothing seemed strange about the process. We were honest in our answers. There were ^{no} weird questions. No one ever asked us why we didn't adopt John.
13. We were all expecting to move together. So I don't understand why this happened in the end. I don't understand why we were separated from him.

14. On July 4, 2017, officers from Dzaleka Refugee Camp accompanied us from the camp to the airport. When we arrived at the airport, they called out the names of the travelers. One by one all of our names were called. Except my son John. Despite going through the whole process together as a family and arranging our travel together, he was not on that list.
15. It was very confusing. It's hard to wrap my head around what happened.
16. One of the officers from the refugee camp told us not to worry about it. He said maybe John would join us in a week and told us to go on ahead. They didn't give us any reason. We all cried about it. But it seemed like our tears didn't help at all.
17. It's been more than a week and we are still separated. John's still not here. It doesn't seem like he is coming now. And no one can tell us why.
18. I understand John's belief that he was left behind because he's not considered family. The only difference between him and all my other children that are here with me is that he is legally my nephew. All my sons are here. Except John. When he was left behind at the airport, it was like leaving my son.
19. John's mom is just devastated. One of her children is not with her. There is a gap in our family. It's not the same anymore. John has been with us his whole life. His siblings are depressed. There is something missing. I'm heartbroken because John is not sitting next to me like the rest of my sons. All my sons are here, except John. I want to see him. I miss him. I want him to be here with me. We need him home with us.
20. I am very worried about John because I don't even know if he's safe. What if he's been attacked? He's in a refugee camp. Anything can happen there and now he's all alone.
21. I'm worried about his health. Is he eating? Does he even have enough to eat? I always made sure all my kids had good, healthy food. I made sure they all had enough to eat, even when times were hard. I provided everything for my children.
22. If I could speak with John right now, I would tell him to please not to lose hope. There are people trying to help. I believe something good can come out of this. I believe we will be together again.
23. If there is anything anyone can do to help reunite me with my son, I hope someone will let me know.
24. I have only just arrived here in Arkansas. I do not have access to a printer right now. I authorize Marissa Ram of the International Refugee Assistance Project ("IRAP") to use this photo of my signature, specifically for the purposes of this declaration.

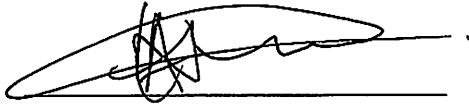


Mwenda Watata

July 12, 2017

Date

I, Nancy Wallace, certify that I am fluent in the English and Swahili languages, and have verified that the above declaration is an accurate translation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Nancy Wallace', written over a horizontal line.

Nancy Wallace

July 12, 2017

Date