

# THE STORIES: XERIP



First name: **XERIP**

Last name: **SIYABEND**

Age: **31**

Country of origin: **KURDISTAN**

**(Turkish citizenship)**

Living in **Italy** since: **November 2012**

## SHORT SUMMARY

*'In Turkey the army was operating in the Kurdish areas burning villages and killing Kurdish civilians. You cannot freely express your cultural and political identity, and there is no freedom to express your opinion publicly, nor the ability to defend human rights. And it is this state of affairs which forces me to leave the country, to avoid jail and serious persecution or death.'*

## “... I HAD TO ESCAPE BECAUSE I'M A PACIFICIST ”

### XERIP'S STORY: CONFLICT AND ESCAPE

Xerip Siyabend was born in Diyarbakir, Turkey. He has 2 sisters and 2 brothers, of which he is the oldest brother. Xerip has a degree in Fashion, and after college started working in the fashion industry for a year. While studying he worked in the film industry as an artistic director, film assistant, and as a photographer collaborating with national and international journalists. Both of his sisters have

studied at the Fine Arts Academy, his brothers are football players, his mother works at home and his father is a songwriter.

In 1980 during the state coup in Turkey, as with many Kurdish families, his father's family was forced to move to Istanbul to create a new life. In 1984 his parents were married and moved to Silvan. In 1986 he was born, and after his birth they moved back to Istanbul because of the Turkish government pressure, where he attended elementary school, middle school and high school.

During those years he suffered discrimination by the Turkish government and nationalists because he wanted to study in his mother tongue, the Kurdish language. He was mistreated when he was 12 years old and sent to prison for about a week. During his days in jail he was tortured, but always stood up against the Turkish government's crimes. After high school he and his parents returned back to Kurdistan, in Southeast Turkey. He was there for about three months and then had the opportunity to participate in the European Voluntary Service (EVS) in Eboli, Italy. After six months, at the end of the project he returned to Turkey and joined the Kafkas University at the faculty of economics.

During the first year of University he became an activist to defend human rights and the official Kurdish language recognition at universities. He started organizing petitions at Universities, after the launch of his campaign he was expelled from the University. After three years, in 2009 with the new law, he had the opportunity to go back to college and join another faculty, graduating in 2011. Soon after, the Turkish army forced him to enrol in the military service. In Turkey the army was operating in the Kurdish areas, burning villages and killing Kurdish civilians. Being a pacifist, he had to escape.

**I overcome obstacles by asking help to my Italian friends and associations.**

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He declared himself a conscientious objector and for a year hid himself moving around the country, until November 2012 when he arrived in Italy by plane.

## STRUGGLING IN THE NEW SOCIETY

When he arrived in Italy he had various difficulties like other asylum seekers. He slept several days in front of the desk to ask for political asylum and also in the streets, until he found the 'Socio-cultural Kurdish Ararat centre' where he stayed until October 2013. At the centre he was able to share his culture and identity with other Kurds coming from other areas of Kurdistan. He shared with them not only his culture but also his pains, because all of those that arrived and those that are already in the centre had similar experiences and sorrows.

His first obstacle was the language. The other major obstacles being the burden of bureaucracy, racism, job search and cultural difference. He received help from other Kurds who had already created a life in Italy, human rights organizations and some of his Italian friends.

## BELONGING AND GIVING BACK TO SOCIETY

When Xerip obtained humanitarian protection he had the opportunity to work in various reception centres as a cultural mediator, and still does volunteering in the socio-cultural Kurdistan Ararat centre.

The goal of his volunteering is to help the Kurds coming to Italy to seek political asylum, to make the Kurdish culture known and the cause of the Kurdish people. He has the opportunity to collaborate

**I have known  
and accepted Italian  
culture but at the same  
time I have made mine  
known too.**

with so many associations working in the world of immigration and human rights. Thanks to his previous experience in photography and film he works with a few journalists producing documentaries in Italy, Syria and Iraq to give voice to ISIS war victims neglected by the media, as well as photographic exhibitions on Kurdish reality.