

Safia Saleh: Kidnapped woman brought home to Britain 34 years after being taken to war-torn Yemen

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Thirty-five year old was abducted by her father aged just 18 months old.

A British woman who was kidnapped more than 30 years ago and taken to war-torn Yemen has returned to the UK.

Safia Saleh was only 18 months old when her father abducted her and her two older sisters, who were aged four and five, and took them to the Middle East.

Her mother, Jackie Saleh, from Cardiff, raised more than Â£7,000 as part of a campaign to bring her youngest daughter back to the UK and in December helped her flee from the Yemen town of Hodeidah.

The town is being bombed by Saudi Arabian warplanes as they fight the Houthi rebels who have taken over much of the country.

A spokeswoman for the Foreign Office said: "Our staff issued Emergency Travel Documents to a British woman and her children and we are pleased that they are now reunited with their family in the UK."

The family arrived in Cardiff on Wednesday after Safia Saleh, now 35 and married with four children, fled to Egypt in December.

Ms Saleh said on Thursday she had been trying to leave Yemen since 2006. She said they "had no money, no house and no school for the children" in Yemen.

Her mother Jackie thanked supporters and Welsh Assembly member Neil McEvoy for their help in bringing her daughter home.

She said: "I want to thank everybody for all your support and everyone who donated to the crowd funder. This day would have never happened otherwise. I want to thank Neil McEvoy for all his support and in organising the crowd funder.

"I am very overwhelmed and so, so happy to be reunited with my daughter Safia after 34 years. I have also gained four grandchildren and a son in law.

"I never gave up fighting for my children. The 34-year journey has been a roller-coaster. Everything has been so intense and I ask that our family be left now to start our new lives. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart."

Safia Saleh said: "I thank everyone here who helped. This situation was very hard, even just to get contact with my mam. The situation in the Yemen because of the war is very, very, difficult. We didn't have the money to come to Wales, so my mother had to help.

"I have been trying to leave the Yemen since 2006. The Embassy in Yemen was no help at all. They just took the fees and did not help. I still have the receipts for the payments.

“I am very happy that I arrived to be with my mother and my sister. It was so difficult in the Yemen. We had no money, no house and no school for the children. There was no security.”

Neil McEvoy AM said: “I hope they can all now live in peace and dignity and that they have a happy home full of love. They deserve that.

“For my part, I’ll continue to help them in any way I can as they move on to the next chapter in their amazing story.”

- The Independent