

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
US CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES
VERMONT SERVICE CENTER**

IN THE MATTER OF:)
)
CLIENT NAME)
Self-Petitioner)

DECLARATION OF CLIENT NAME IN SUPPORT OF HER I-360 VAWA SELF-PETITION

I, CLIENT NAME, hereby declare the following under the pains and penalties of perjury:

My Life in [REDACTED]

1. I was born on [REDACTED] 1 [REDACTED], and raised in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with my four sisters, mother and father. My mother raised all five of us children, while my father worked as a gardener. Our family had very little money, and my parents could not afford to pay all of our school fees. My father beat us with a belt and refused to feed us on school nights if we tried to do our homework instead of work on the family farm. He would also beat us if we didn't do our chores, or if we came home ten minutes late from school to begin work on the farm even though it took us one hour to walk home from our school building.

2. Because my parents could no longer continue paying my school fees, I dropped out of school by the time I was [REDACTED] years old in [REDACTED]. After dropping out of school, giving birth to my two daughters in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], and eventually marrying my daughters' father at the age of [REDACTED], I fell into a life of abuse and extreme poverty with little education or job skills once my first marriage fell apart around [REDACTED]. I struggled for years to avoid homelessness, especially after my children's father stole all of my property, took our children away from me and filed for divorce in [REDACTED].

3. With nowhere else to go, I was blessed with an opportunity to travel to the United States in [REDACTED] on a 10-year visitor visa with the hope of turning my life around. I thought I also found a second chance at love in [REDACTED] when I met my current husband, [REDACTED] [REDACTED], a U.S. citizen. Instead, when I married [REDACTED], I naively entered into a life of extreme physical, sexual and financial abuse. Although I was living in the U.S., I had

no freedom or independence, became trapped inside a cruel abusive marriage, and unknowingly gave up my chance of seeing my family in [REDACTED] again.

4. I met my first husband, [REDACTED] at my home church in [REDACTED]. We dated for ten years, had two daughters together in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], and then got married in [REDACTED]. In [REDACTED], [REDACTED] moved away to [REDACTED] to complete a three-year Master's degree in architecture at [REDACTED] University. He stayed in [REDACTED] during this entire time period. I lived in [REDACTED], where I was left to raise our two daughters on my own, although I visited him once in April [REDACTED]. He finally moved back home with me in [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] after he graduated. When he came back from [REDACTED], he seemed like a different person, and no longer committed to our marriage. He was very moody and sometimes would not talk to me for days. He gave me a small amount of money to start a clothing business, because he said we needed more income. But, my business was unsuccessful and did not earn any profit, and he blamed me for its failure. Over time, he grew increasingly distant and bitter toward me.

5. Sometime in [REDACTED], I came home, and found [REDACTED] in our bedroom having sex with another woman. We began arguing, and his mistress locked herself inside of our bedroom. I called the local police to have her removed from our house. [REDACTED] left before the police arrived, but later returned to our house the same day and yelled at me, because I called the police. The next day, [REDACTED] locked me and our two daughters inside of our house, so that we couldn't escape. He left once more screaming that he was going to get a gun and kill me. I called the police again after he left a second time. When the police arrived, they broke into the house to free me and my two daughters. The police then located my ex-husband the same day, arrested him, and put him in jail with a 1-year sentence. Approximately six weeks later, I dropped the charges hoping that we could try and make the marriage work for the sake of our daughters. He was also the breadwinner, and I was left with no means when he was in jail. But, two weeks after he returned home, I found romantic text messages on his phone between him and his mistress. At that point, I decided that we should be separated, because he was unfaithful to the marriage.

6. When I separated from [REDACTED] I and my daughters went to live with my mother and three sisters (one of my sisters passed away some time ago). My three sisters harassed and shamed me, because in my culture, a woman my age should not live back at home with her parent and siblings when she's still married. My sisters told me that I was too old to live at home, and threatened to kick me out of the house, because I could not contribute financially. I had very little job skills and tried to search for years to find a job without success, and would often go days without any money or food. In [REDACTED], [REDACTED] delivered papers to me at my mother's house. He

claimed that it was a separation agreement that would fairly control how we handle our children and property, while we lived apart. I could not afford a lawyer, and was too uneducated to interpret a legal document. But, I signed the agreement believing that [REDACTED] wanted to treat me fairly and had the best interest of our children. I didn't realize at the time that by signing the document, I officially granted him a divorce with my signature, and also gave him all the power to take our house, car and full custody of our children. In [REDACTED] I finally found a job as a driver to help my mother with living expenses. I lost my only job a few months later. My mother and sisters said that I was a burden for them and eventually kicked me out of the house. I went to live with friends in [REDACTED] [REDACTED], but they, too, were unemployed. Desperate to make ends meet, I eventually sold myself into prostitution for about two months in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

7. My ex-husband failed to take care of our two daughters after he took custody of them. He forced them to wait on him hand and foot, as well as the women he dated every day of the week, and did not allow them to focus on school. They washed his laundry by hand, made his bed, and cooked all of the meals. My eldest daughter, [REDACTED] became extremely depressed over the situation. In [REDACTED] I received a call from the local hospital informing me that [REDACTED] was unconscious and had been admitted, because she overdosed on paracetamol in an attempt to commit suicide. I could no longer bear to see myself or my two daughters suffer any longer, and needed a way out. I wanted to go anywhere that I could get a good job to make a better life for us. I thought about going to [REDACTED] or to [REDACTED], because I visited my ex-husband at [REDACTED] and was familiar with the area. I spoke with my sister who had connections in [REDACTED] but she said it would be impossible for me to get a visa. She then put me in touch with a gentleman who told me that even though I had little education or job skills, I could earn a good living in the United States, and my status as a divorced woman would not hinder me or cause me shame there. He said that he could help me get a proper visa, and link me with his colleague in Florida, where I could live, be safe and free from abuse.

Coming to the U.S. and Meeting My Husband, [REDACTED]

8. In [REDACTED], I made the painful decision to leave my two daughters temporarily, and came to the U.S. on a visitor visa. I thought that I could earn a living and go back to help my daughters and be with my family the same way I saw other [REDACTED] travel back and forth between the U.S. and my home country, as I had a 10-year visa. I began working upon my arrival as a maid for a few months at [REDACTED] Hotel in [REDACTED]. Eventually, I decided to move to [REDACTED] to live with close family friends. I established a community for myself, and joined the [REDACTED] church in [REDACTED].

██████████ I was also a member of the ██████████ Church back home in ██████████, but the closest branch to my ██████████ residence was based in ██████████. In ██████████, I also got a job as a maid at an ██████████ facility.

9. In ██████████ when I was out running errands after work, I met my current husband, ██████████, in the parking lot area just outside of ██████████ restaurant. We started talking, exchanged numbers, and decided to go out to dinner that evening. Neither of us liked the ██████████ atmosphere, so we agreed to go eat at a nearby ██████████ restaurant and get to know one another. We hit it off very well on our first date. I thought he was so smart. He told me that he was previously in the U.S. Army, and by the way he spoke, he seemed well travelled. He even knew about my country, ██████████. I was so intrigued, because most of the American men that I met previously had no idea where I was from or anything about my home country. ██████████ told me that he really loved my accent and how beautiful I was.

10. After our first date, we started dating regularly for about six months. He took me out to dinner, and we both enjoyed going to Mexican and seafood restaurants most frequently. We also went to cigar lounges often and attended parties together with friends. ██████████ occasionally attended the ██████████ Church with me in ██████████

11. After two or three months, ██████████ introduced me to his mother, ██████████ who currently lives in ██████████ and also took me to his hometown in ██████████ to meet his father, ██████████, stepmother, ██████████, and his grandmother, ██████████. We seemed to have so much in common. Both of us were divorced, and we related to one another's pain of a previous marriage. He had four children from his past marriage, and I had two children from my past marriage. Neither of us had any desire to give birth to more children. We therefore understood each other and what each of us wanted out of a relationship. Finally, in ██████████ he asked me to move in with him at his townhouse located at ██████████. Soon thereafter, he asked me to stop working at the ██████████ living facility, because he said he would care for me.

12. In ██████████ just a few months after we moved in together, ██████████ took me to the ██████████ Restaurant, and proposed to me with a silver diamond ring. I was so excited that this handsome, intelligent man was ready to commit to me. We agreed to get married in ██████████. But, two weeks before our wedding date, he suddenly changed his mind, and told me that he was not ready to get married. I was devastated, and completely embarrassed, because I invited about thirty of my friends to attend the wedding, but had to cancel. I later learned that he had another girlfriend. He

wanted to officially break it off with her before getting married to me. I felt betrayed, but by the time I found out, he seemed genuine about breaking off the relationship with her.

13. In [REDACTED] he told me that he had come to his senses, realized that I was truly a good woman, and was ready to marry me. He said that I was faithful to him, and he was impressed that I didn't leave him even when he backed out of getting married in [REDACTED]. He also said that he was thankful, because I got along well with his children, including his son, [REDACTED] who is now 13, and stayed with us usually during the summertime or other school breaks. [REDACTED] lived with his biological mother, [REDACTED]'s ex-wife, and other siblings for the majority of the school year.

14. We eventually got married on [REDACTED] at the [REDACTED] Court in [REDACTED] and he added me as his wife to his apartment lease. [REDACTED]'s mother and friend attended the ceremony, but I chose not to invite anyone to spare myself embarrassment if [REDACTED] suddenly cancelled our wedding again, although I was able to wear my wedding dress that I bought when we were supposed to get married in [REDACTED]. We didn't have a honeymoon or do anything fancy after the wedding. His mother and friend left, and [REDACTED] and I went to [REDACTED] restaurant on our own in [REDACTED].

[REDACTED]'s Abusively Controlling Behavior

15. [REDACTED] and I got along well when we first moved in together, and also during the first few months of our marriage. From the time we moved in together in [REDACTED] until about [REDACTED] he seemed to display such chivalry, and I was completely in love with him. He always opened the car door for me, took me to spas, and sometimes cooked dinner or would bring me breakfast in bed. I go to bed early around 8:00 p.m. in the evenings, and he would often tuck me in bed or give me a massage. We frequently planned short weekend trips together, and spent the night sometimes at either the [REDACTED] Hotel in [REDACTED] or at the [REDACTED] Hotel in [REDACTED].

16. But, our "honeymoon phase" abruptly ended after the first three or four months of our marriage. Around [REDACTED] [REDACTED] started to become very controlling of me and my whereabouts. He no longer allowed me to travel around town or take taxi cabs on my own. He insisted on driving me to all of my destinations, and told me that the metro system was too complicated and dangerous for me to travel on my own. He also told me that it was his job as my husband to protect me. When he first said these things, I thought it was normal, because we were married, and he was being protective. Eventually, he also stopped

cooking for me or giving me attention, and told me that I should do all of the cooking. He always complained, because I didn't cook American food. When I confronted him and asked him why he stopped doing nice things for me, he said that his previous behavior was a part of the "chase", and he was only trying to win me over before we were married, but now that I was his wife, it was my job to do those things for him, and I should be submissive.

17. In the spring or summer of [REDACTED], [REDACTED] eventually stopped attending church with me, and forbid me to go to church on my own or with friends. He did not identify as a Christian or Muslim, but said that he respected certain Muslim values and agreed that women should cover themselves and be submissive. He also said that he preferred to attend a place of worship that had a Black pastor, and the pastor at my church was White. He insisted that I wear a head scarf whenever I went outside, and if I refused to do so, he yelled at me, threw things around and used vulgar language. He also said that I should devote all of my attention to him, rub his feet and do other special favors on a daily basis. Sometimes I agreed to do whatever he wanted, because I did not want to get in trouble or I needed him to take me to the mall or the store, and I did not want to upset him.

18. [REDACTED] also became very irritated when I spoke in my native language on the phone to my mother or other family members who reside in [REDACTED], because he couldn't understand me, and became suspicious of me. He began ordering me to speak to my mother in English even though my mother cannot speak or understand the English language. I was so frustrated and sad, because I could not communicate with my mother, and she could not understand a word I said.

19. My eldest daughter, [REDACTED] eventually came to the United States on her own. I wanted her to live with me and [REDACTED], because in my culture, it is appropriate for a daughter to live with her parents, until she is married. He refused to allow [REDACTED] to live with us and limited my interaction with her. I felt so hopeless and depressed, because I could not be with her, and I didn't know what to do or say. [REDACTED] said that in America, people who are over age 18 do not live with their parents. I felt I had no way to convince him differently. He wanted [REDACTED] to go away and join the military, and became cold toward her when she resisted. He said that he did not understand my culture, and constantly told me that he wished I were American.

[REDACTED] Cut Off My Finances

20. [REDACTED] insisted that it was his job as my husband to protect and provide for me. Although I quit my job at the [REDACTED] facility when he asked me to when we

moved in together, I sometimes took small babysitting jobs occasionally. But, once we were officially married in [REDACTED] he told me that I did not need my own money and could no longer babysit. He said that I could not work outside of our home anywhere, because I might interact with men and attract them to me. I explained to him how much I wanted to work, and that I struggled to finally gain independence and job skills since [REDACTED] when I dropped out of school in [REDACTED], and how important it was to me to have my own job. He just looked at me and said “that’s bullshit [REDACTED]”

21. He did not even permit me to go to the grocery store. I was hungry and emotionally drained. He rarely bought enough food for the two of us, because according to him, we were on a tight budget. He did not even allow me to purchase my own clothes without accompanying me, and he picked out my clothes for me. He eventually stole my ATM card from me, and refused to allow me to see statements from our joint account at [REDACTED] Bank, or question any of his financial decisions.

22. He sometimes took away my cell phone and refused to buy me calling cards as punishment, because I was talking on the phone when he was in the house instead of paying him attention. He said that I should only make calls when he’s not home, but when he’s home, all attention should be on him, and I should only speak English. I now have no money and borrow from friends for emergencies. I felt like I lost all freedom. [REDACTED] worked at a [REDACTED] store until about [REDACTED], and more recently began working at the [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. He stopped wearing his wedding ring to work, and told me how other women find him really attractive on his job. I felt rejected and belittled. He told me I should be glad I don’t have to work, and just “sit back, be beautiful and enjoy the ride.”

[REDACTED] Slapped, Pushed, Spit and Threatened to Use His Gun on Me

23. In [REDACTED] my daughter, [REDACTED] decided to come visit me at my and [REDACTED]’s place. [REDACTED]’s friend dropped her at a nearby shopping center, but [REDACTED] refused to pick up [REDACTED] from the shopping center or arrange a cab for her to come to our apartment, as planned. Eventually, [REDACTED] found a way on her own to travel to our apartment, but when [REDACTED] arrived, [REDACTED] forbid me from answering the door. He and I began arguing when he suddenly opened his hand and slapped me twice on the left side of my face, spit on me and pushed me down on the floor. My face stayed swollen for days. I called the police after he hit me and pushed me down, but hung up the phone when the police answered, because I was afraid [REDACTED] would retaliate.

24. [REDACTED]'s son, [REDACTED] was visiting us, while all of this was happening. [REDACTED] heard yelling and rumbling and eventually came out of his bedroom. [REDACTED] told him to go outside and play. When [REDACTED] went outside, I got up from the floor and tried to fight [REDACTED] back. [REDACTED] turned and punched me in my head, and told me never to fight him again. He dragged me down to the basement, put on boxing gloves, and said to me, "if you want to fight, show me what you got." I apologized to him over and over again, because I just wanted the situation to be over.

25. He calmed down, and said that he wanted to have sex with me, and that I know what to do to make him feel better. He commanded me to go to the bedroom and take off my clothes. I did, because I was tired of fighting. I cried that night and felt so empty spiritually. My eyes were swollen from so much crying. I just wanted to end my life. I took 15-20 Tylenol pills hoping to overdose. I couldn't understand why God allowed this to happen to me. I left my home country for a better life only to be beaten and abused by an American man. [REDACTED] told me when we argued that he could understand why my first husband wanted to kill me.

26. The next day after the fight, [REDACTED] got me flowers and a card and said it would all get better. I was confused, and hoped that everything would be alright, because he never physically abused me before, but nothing changed.

27. [REDACTED] tried to shut me down every time I expressed my opinion or contradicted him or told him that I wanted to see my daughter. In [REDACTED], [REDACTED] dropped me off at [REDACTED] Salon in [REDACTED] for a hair appointment. He wanted me to get a style with twists made from my natural hair. After he dropped me off, I decided to get my hair braided with extensions instead. When [REDACTED] came to pick me up, and saw my hairstyle, he shouted at me for getting my hair braided. He said that he dated me and fell in love with me, because I wore my hair natural, and told me that I should only wear hair styles that he likes.

28. When we got home, he grabbed me by my braids when I was going up the stairs, threw me against the wall, and dragged me down the stairs. He refused to speak to me the entire week, until I removed the braids. I finally took them out, because I wanted to make peace.

29. About one month later, once when I refused to wear a head scarf, he wouldn't let me go outside, and left the house without me, and said that the marriage will not work. He said that we needed a separation, and told me how he wished he'd stayed with his ex-

girlfriend, because she did whatever he wanted. When he came back, he pressured me to have sex. He took off my clothes, and I tried to push him away and fight him a little bit. He berated me and called me names like “foolish”, “stupid” and “bitch”. He also kept a gun under our bed, and constantly reminded me that he could use his weapon on me. He said that he had friends in the police force, because he was a former cop from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED], and he could kill me and make me disappear anytime. I wanted to run away from him, because I was so afraid, but feared what could happen if I tried to escape.

30. In [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] of [REDACTED], we got evicted from our townhome, because [REDACTED] [REDACTED] could not afford to pay rent by himself. We went to live with his mother in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from about [REDACTED] to [REDACTED], until we could find a place to live. In [REDACTED], we moved into our current apartment-style condominium located at [REDACTED]. He did not tell our new landlord that I was his wife or put me on the lease when I asked him to, although my name is on some of our utility bills. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] said that it was not important for me to have my name on the lease, and I should be glad I have shelter and a place to live. Once when the maintenance man came to our apartment, [REDACTED] even made me hide in our bedroom and stay silent, until the maintenance man left. It seemed like [REDACTED] did not want anyone to know that I existed when we moved to our second residence. I later learned that [REDACTED] got our current apartment through a program with [REDACTED] and received a special discount through the government program, because he was a veteran. He thought it might hurt his chances of getting the discount if my name were included on the lease, because I am from another country.

[REDACTED] Sexually Abused Me

31. Sex is very painful for me, because I have fibroids. Often, in the middle of the night when [REDACTED] wanted to have sex, he would pour cold water on me to wake me up. When I refused or said that I was too tired to have sex, he would force me anyway and tell me that I could go back to sleep whenever he was finished. One night around [REDACTED] [REDACTED], he tried to wake me up to have sex, but I told him I was in pain. So, he went and got a gallon of water, and poured it all over me. I took off the T-shirt I slept in, because it was soaked. When I tried to get a towel, he snatched the towel from my hand. I then tried to grab the blanket to cover myself, but he snatched that too. I felt humiliated standing there wet and naked. He pushed me back down on the bed, and I gave in and had sex with him hoping he would finally leave me alone.

32. I wanted to go to the doctor to get treated for my pain, but [REDACTED] refused to take me to the hospital. Finally, in [REDACTED], I escaped, and took a cab on my own to the [REDACTED] Hospital. After I arrived at the hospital, he called me, and I told him where I was located, and he met me there. [REDACTED] went with me into the doctor's office, and the doctor examined me and told me I had fibroids. The doctor also said that stress makes my condition worse. When the doctor explained my condition, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] blamed me privately, and told me that my pain and stress were my own fault, because I was not submissive to him. I was saddened and confused by his reaction.

33. I continued to hope that our marriage relationship would improve. A few days after I went to the hospital, we decided to spend time together and booked a [REDACTED] hotel room for a night in [REDACTED]. We ate dinner together at a fancy hamburger restaurant near the hotel, but when we left, I happened to walk a few steps in front of him. He quickly caught up to me, stomped my foot extremely hard, and scolded me saying that I should never walk in front of him, because he "is the man" in the relationship, and it looked bad to other people that he was not in charge of his woman. We left the restaurant, and walked back to the hotel, which was walking distance from the restaurant. While walking, I saw the police and felt tempted to scream, so that they could help me, and I would be free, but I was too afraid.

34. When we got to the hotel room, he slapped me on the left side of my face, and threw a glass of water, and the glass shattered. I left the hotel room, and went down to the lobby by myself and cried where no one could see me. I finally went back to the room when I calmed down. [REDACTED] told me that this was my fault, and I should try to make him happy. He said that he wanted to have "make-up sex". He pulled my clothes off, and I tried to cover myself with blankets, but he kept pressuring me. He said that if I didn't have sex and be a good wife, he would call the police, and arrange to have me deported. Because he was a former cop, I believed him and figured he knew what he was talking about. I gave in eventually, because I just wanted to rest and stop arguing, and feared that he would call the police. I felt depressed and had no hope of changing my situation.

Leaving [REDACTED]'s Abuse

35. In [REDACTED], I started going to [REDACTED] a local domestic violence shelter in [REDACTED]. I began sneaking away when my husband was at work to go there to receive counseling once a week. Later, one day in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] began yelling and belittling me again, because I would not wear a headscarf. He said that I was uncovered when he first met me, but because I am now married, I should cover my face. He then kicked me out of the house. He told me to move out, because we couldn't get

along in our marriage, and I was only a liability to him even though he never allowed me to work and stole my independence. He said that I'm not affectionate enough, and should be more submissive. I was able to pack a few personal belongings before I fled to [REDACTED]. The shelter workers continued to counsel me, and recommended that I schedule an appointment with Tahirih Justice Center to get legal help. I attended my first appointment at Tahirih Justice Center on [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] kept texting me that same day begging me to return home. I decided to go back hoping we could make our relationship work.

36. About one week later, there was a major blizzard in [REDACTED] and we couldn't go anywhere. On [REDACTED] I decided to call my family in the morning, and he forbid me from using my cell phone. He later used his cell phone to talk to someone that same afternoon. When I confronted him to tell him that it was unfair for him to use his phone if I were forbidden to use mine, he drug me from the couch, threw me against the wall and tried to slap me in the face. I put up my hands to protect my face, and he punched me all along my arms.

37. I called the police, but [REDACTED] fled before they arrived. The police gave me an incident number, and told me to file a protection order. [REDACTED]'s mother called me that night, and said that [REDACTED] was at her house in [REDACTED]. She came to pick me up around 2:30 a.m. the next morning, so that [REDACTED] could return to our apartment without me present. [REDACTED]'s mother and I went to breakfast at a nearby [REDACTED]. She told me never to call the police on her son, and said that I should only call and confide in her about the abuse. She then confessed that [REDACTED] had a history of abusing women, and told me that I should leave him, because he would never change. We left the restaurant, and [REDACTED]'s mother drove me to my friend's apartment, because I needed a place to stay. [REDACTED] kept texting me to return home. His mother told him where I was located, and he sent me cards at my friend's address. I was terribly sad about the state of my marriage, but too afraid to go home, because he might physically abuse me and rape me again. I also feared that he might harass my friend who was hosting me, and she did not want to get in the middle of our marital dispute. For months, I have not been able to sleep, and have been deeply depressed and anxious over this situation. I decided to return to [REDACTED] shelter on [REDACTED], [REDACTED] where I was permitted to stay for only two weeks, because I am not a resident of [REDACTED] where [REDACTED] is based. I now stay with a friend in [REDACTED] until I can find shelter elsewhere.

38. I came to the U.S. without knowing anyone to make a better life for myself. The only person that I loved and trusted with all my being abused and betrayed me. I hope that I will be given the chance to stay in the U.S., as I am confident that I can make it here, and will not be a burden to the U.S. government. I was a good citizen in [REDACTED], a hard worker in the U.S., faithful to my church community, and continue to believe and serve God. I am asking for your kindness and the authority invested in you to grant me permanent residency in the United States and the freedom to live my life in this country that I love in safety and with dignity.

39. I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing facts are true and correct to the best of my knowledge. Thank you so much.

Respectfully yours,

[Client signature]
CLIENT NAME

DATE