



AS IT IS

Guinean Student Rides across Africa to Get to School

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Mamadou Safaiou Barry lives in the West African nation of Guinea. He wanted to study Islamic **theology** at a top school in Cairo, Egypt.

Without money to pay for transport, Barry drew a map of Africa and headed out on a used **bicycle** for the trip across the continent.

Carrying only a change of clothes, a flashlight, and a small tool, the 25-year-old rode through jungles, deserts, and conflict areas in the hope of getting accepted to the school and finding a way to pay for it.

Four months and seven countries later, he is in Cairo with a full **scholarship** to Al-Azhar University. That is one of the world's oldest and most respected Sunni Muslim learning centers.

"If you have a dream, stay with it and be strong," Barry said. "God will help you."

Thousands of West Africans like Barry take risky journeys across the Sahara desert each year, searching for a better life. But many never make it. Nearly 500 people died or disappeared on West African migration routes last year, data from the International Organization for Migration shows.

Barry decided the risk was worth the **reward**.

"I had to fight," Barry said last August in Chad.

Barry rode about 100 kilometers each day. He rode through Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo, Benin, and Niger. He had to stop in N'Djamena, the Chadian capital because of the ongoing conflict in Sudan.

He said he had already been detained three times - twice in Burkina Faso and once in Togo. There, security forces held him for nine days without charge before releasing him for \$56.

That was all of his money for the rest of the trip, he said.

"I often slept in the **bush** because I was afraid of people in the cities," Barry said. "I thought they would take my bike and hurt me."

Barry's luck changed again in Chad. There, a local **philanthropist**, who had read about his trip online, offered to fly him directly to Egypt and avoid the fighting in Sudan.

Barry arrived in Cairo on September 5 and days later received a full scholarship to Al-Azhar.

He intends to return to Guinea when his studies are complete, to spread the **faith** that has taken him so far.

"When I return to my country, I would like to be someone who teaches Islam and tells people how to do good things," he said.

I'm Dan Novak.

Dan Novak adapted this story for VOA Learning English based on reporting from Reuters.

Words in This Story

theology — *n.* the study of religious faith, practice, and experience

bicycle — *n.* a 2-wheeled vehicle that a person rides by pushing on foot pedals

scholarship — *n.* an amount of money that is given by a school, an organization, etc., to a student to help pay for the student's education

reward — *n.* to give money or another kind of payment to for something good that has been done

bush — *n.* a large area that has not been cleared and that is not used for farming

philanthropist — *n.*

a wealthy person who gives money and time to help make life better for other people

faith — *n.* strong belief or trust in someone or something
