Mari Malek: Where I come from, South Sudan, we are very strong and resilient. We’ve been going through war for over four decades and we are still sticking through it and still surviving, and still living and still making things. So that is in my blood.

Mari Malek is a New York-based supermodel, DJ and actor. She is also a refugee. War in South Sudan forced her to flee her country as a child. After four years in a refugee camp, she was granted entry to the US.

We lived in the projects. I was just an awkward child, tall, black. Where did she come from? Who is she? And I really couldn’t express myself because I didn’t know how to speak English.

Despite many setbacks, she eventually succeeded as a model.

When you do become a model, doesn’t mean you get a contract and then you become rich and famous and everything is awesome. No, no, no. It’s hard work, and I’m probably one of the only few black women in the industry.

Mari has not forgotten her past. She advocates tirelessly for the people of her war-torn homeland.

I wish I could help all of them, … but I can’t! And it hurts my heart to see children, you know, suffering like this.

Her activism has taken her to the UN … and to former President Obama. She has also formed a non-profit focused on education in South Sudan.

Everything that I’m doing connects because if I’m DJ-ing, modelling or acting, I always have to be doing it for a purpose and connecting it back to the story of where I come from. This is why I do this, to inspire refugee kids, to inspire anybody who’s facing difficulties and think that they cannot get out of it. Yes, you can, you can do it.

To be strong, resilient, never give up on myself. That’s how I’ve made it this far.