

**CONGRESSIONAL HEARING
TO TESTIFY AT A HEARING ENTITLED: VIOLENT ISLAMIST EXTREMISTS:
“AI SHABAAB RECRUITMENT IN AMERICA”**

Statement of

Osman Ahmed

On Behalf of the

**Victim Families Whose Children Have been Recruited
And Kidnapped To Somalia**

**Before the United States Senate
Committee on
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

**March 8, 2009
Minneapolis, Minnesota**

Committee on
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Washington, DC 20510-6250

Dear Senators Lieberman and Collins:

I would like to thank you on behalf of the family members of the children who were recruited to Somalia, members of the Somali community and on my own behalf for inviting us to the Congressional Hearing Committee.

We would also like to thank the senatorial officials who came all the way to Minneapolis on February 28, 2009 to meet with the family members and the community. Also I want to acknowledge FBI office in Minneapolis and its agents who work day and night to locate our children. We do indeed feel grateful of their extreme efforts.

The first time we became suspicious was when we received a message from Roosevelt High School saying that our kid, Burhan, missed all school classes that November 4th day of 2008. That, to us sounded strange and we were stunned. We roamed around the metropolitan area and even beyond, nationwide. We went to Abu-Bakar Al Saddique mosque and Dawa Mosque, called our building security, called Hennepin County medical Center, hospital emergencies, and the airport. After that, his mother looked into his room and found that his travel luggage was missing, his clothes were not there and his passport was missing. We immediately notified respective law enforcement agencies. We immediately contacted the local police office MPD and the FBI office in Minneapolis, MN.

We have been up on our heels since we have realized that our children were mentally and physically kidnapped on November 4, 2008, on Election Day!!

Understanding Challenges the Somali community in Minneapolis faces today

There are many challenges that the Somali community in Minnesota faces like other first generation immigrants. These include limited language proficiency, limited skills and cultural barrier as well as the Minnesota weather. Most of these Somali American families are headed by single mothers.

The system is an alternative approach but understanding it is also a barrier. The neighborhood, particularly the West Bank/ Cedar/Riverside area, has limited resources that could be of value to the community members.

Perspective of Family Members of the Recruited Kids

The missing Somali American children created anguish and fear to the immediate family members and in the general communities. No one can imagine the destruction this issue has caused for these mothers and grandmothers. They are going through the worst time in their lives. Imagine, how these parents feel when their children are returned back to the country were they originally fled from the chaos, genocide, gang rape and lawlessness.

There are five children among the many that were sent to Somalia. Burhan Hassan (17 years old, senior at Roosevelt High), Mohamud Hassan (18 years old, studying Engineering at the University of Minnesota), Abdisalam Ali (19 years old, studying health at the University of Minnesota) and Jamal Aweys (19 years old, studying engineering at Minneapolis Community and Technical College – MCTC- and later at Normandale College here in Minnesota) as well as Mustafa Ali (18 years old, studying at Harding High School in St. Paul)

These Somali American kids were not troubled kids or gangs. They were the hope of the Somali American community. They were the doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists and leaders of the future of our strong and prosperous nation. For instance, Burhan Hassan was a brilliant student with straight As and on top of his class. He was taking college course, i.e. Calculus, Advanced Chemistry etc, as he was about to graduate from high school. These classes were sponsored by the University of Minnesota. He was an ambitious kid with the hope to go to Harvard University to study medicine or law and become a medical doctor or a lawyer.

All these youth shared common things. They all left Somali in their infancy like my nephew Burhan Hassan. He was eight (8) months old when they arrived at the refugee camp in Kenya. He was less than four (4) years old (February 12, 1996) when they came to the USA. Like his peers, Burhan Hassan never interested in Somali politics, or understood Somali clan issues. Burhan grew up in a single parent household. His immediate family members including his mother and sibling are educated. He studied Islam at a nearby Abu-Bakar As-Saddique mosque like the rest of the kids since 1998. (*Abu-Bakar As- Saddique was opened couple of years ago. Before then, it used be called Shafi'e Mosque in Cedar Riverside Neighborhood when Burhan started.*) He attended its youth group. These kids have no perception of Somalia except the one that was formed in their mind by their teachers at the Abu-Bakar Center. We believe that these children did not travel to Somalia by

themselves. There must be others who made them understand that going to Somalia and participating the fighting is the right thing to do. To address the issue from a factual perspective, it is the dream of every Somali parent to have their children go to the mosque but none of them expected to have their children's mind programmed in a manner that is in line with the extremist's ideologies. In the case of Burhan, he spent more than 10 years going to the mosque. This is evidenced by others who also attended the mosque.

One thing for sure is that the methods of indoctrination are highly sophisticated. The plan of Al-Shabaab is basically to destroy the world peace and they will turn every leaf to achieve that. Their mission is not isolated into Somalia but has far reaching goals.

The Somali American youth were isolated because they have been told that if they share their views with others including their family members, they will not be understood and might as well be turned over to the *infidel's* hands. These children are victims in every side. They have been lied to. They were told that they will be shown the Islamic utopia that has been hidden from them by the infidels and the brain washed parents. Our children had no clue they were being recruited to join Al-Shabab. We are getting a lot of information back from in Somalia. We also heard that when kids arrive, they are immediately shocked at what utopia is and all their documents and belongings are confiscated. They are whisked to hidden military camps for trainings. They are also told if they flee and return home that they will end up in Guantanamo. They do not know anyone in Somalia.

Why Al-Shabab is interested in American and Western Kids.

We believe the reason Al- Shabab is interested in American and western kids is that these kids do not have any relatives in Somalia. They cannot go back to their countries for they will be told to the authorities by local Al-Shabab recruiters. They are also very valuable in interpreting for Al-Shabab trainers of American and western descent.

They could be used for anything they want. They could be trained or forced to become suicide bombers in Somalia and they can do it out of desperation. For many of them, Burhan for example, have no idea where he could go for help in Somalia. This the first time he has been to Somalia in his life. These are basically the main reasons of why Al-Shabaab is recruiting from Western countries.

Another issue of paramount importance is the fact that we are the first family members who informed the law enforcement about the missing of these youth. Family members whose children sent to Somalia were scared to even talk to the law enforcement. We have been painted as bad people within the Somali community by the mosque management. We have been threatened for just speaking out. Some members of Abu-Bakr Al-Saddique mosque told us that if we talk about the issue, the Muslim center will be destroyed and Islamic communities will be wiped out. They tell parents that if they report their missing kid to the FBI that FBI will send the parents to Guantanamo Jail. And this message has been very effective tool to silence parents and the community. They do have a lot cash to use for propaganda machine. They strike fear on a daily basis, here in Minneapolis, among Somali speaking community in order to stop the community to cooperate with the law enforcement. Public threats were issued to us at Abu-Bakar Assidique for simply speaking with CNN and Newsweek. The other mystery is that they say something in Somali TVs, at their congregations and say something contrary to that in English while speaking to the mainstream media or community.

They also told us not to talk to media because that will also endanger the Muslim leaders. We have been projected as pariah within the community by these mosque leaders. We are tormented by the fact that our children are missing and imperil. These members are scaring us so that we stop talking to law enforcement.

Perspective on Al-Shabaab to Attract Young People to Their Cause

The most important factor on how Al- Shabaab attracts the young Somali Americans is the indoctrination of the children. They are programmed to understand that it is their duty to confront the infidels. There are youth programs that in some instances have some hidden agendas. These agendas include that whatever issues that might come across in life is twisted as being the work of the infidels. They have been told to understand that the Ethiopian troops in Somalia are casted as an act of aggression against the Islamic religion. Al-Shabab is not only interested in recruiting Somali American youth but others in other Western countries, such as UK, Germany, Canada and Australia. The main reason for Al-Shabaab to recruit from these countries is that these youth have different view than a typical Somali in Somalia. They do not know much about Somali clan and have no political affiliation whatsoever.

There are some radical groups who were a minority in their thinking. However, when the Ethiopian troops came to Somalia, some Somali American professors clearly declared the war against Ethiopian troops. This has been a

escape goat for their extremist political views. It encouraged radical Islamic groups in the US who previously were not active in the political activities here and in Somalia.

In conclusion, we the families of the missing kids have been conducting an outreach campaign to reach out those families that has not come forward. We believe this is the tip of the iceberg. In our outreach, we have been very successful to help some families to come forward and trust the law enforcement like we did.

Recommendation for Preventing Recruitment in the Future

- Educating members of the Somali community on the importance of cooperation between law enforcement and the community.
- Empower the Families of the missing kids to continue the outreach to those families who did not come forward.
- Bring to justice those who are responsible.
- Create special task force to combat the Al-Shabab recruitment in MN, OH, Washington Seattle and Boston, MA
- Scrutinize the funding of suspicious non-profit agencies that undertake youth activities possibly related to radical views.
- To investigate if tax payer's money was involved in the brainwashing of our kids because Abu- Bakar Center is a non-profit that might have been getting taxpayer's money for youth programs.
- The mosque Controls large amount of money, which is raised in these mosques, quarterly or same times Yearly fundraising which lacks transparency (huge amount of cash) and portion of that money could have gone to Al-shabaab group, secondly we are requesting more connection between the our community and FBI, so FBI has to do more outreaching programs to the community.
- We need a protection for our children, so that they can escape enemy hands.
- We need that our US Government to forgive these youth to enable us to find ways and means to bring back to their homes. And this will give confidence to many more families to come out of darkness.

Warning:

Al-shabab recruiters have the agility and ability to change form. They usually are well represented not only in certain mosques but wherever Somali children and young adults are concentrated. Such as community centers, charter schools operated by Somalis. They could sometimes pose as Somali community leaders and advice politicians and other agencies that are outreaching to the Somali community.

Osman Ahmed

Somali Community Leader