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## Ottawa mum in Kenya case

Suaad Hagi Mohamud's search for answers about the three months she spent stranded in Kenya was met with stony silence from top government officials responsible for her ordeal.

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CHRISTOPHER PIKE FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Suaad Hagi Mohamud walks with her lawyer, Julian Falconer, after testifying before a committee of MPs on Parliament Hill on Aug. 26, 2009. She has launched a \$2.5 million lawsuit against the government.

By: Allan Woods Ottawa Bureau, Published on Thu Aug 27 2009

OTTAWA—Suaad Hagi Mohamud's search for answers about the three months she spent stranded in Kenya was met with stony silence from top government officials responsible for her ordeal.

Instead of explanations from the people who ruled her Canadian passport a fraud, the clearly nervous and frequently emotional Somali-Canadian yesterday received only a promise that a probe into her mistreatment will be made public and a vow to "get to the bottom of this" from a government she has few reasons to trust.

She spoke too fast on occasion, broke into tears in other parts of her hour-long testimony, but said she had come to the capital to make sure no one else goes through what she had to endure.

"I thought my government would back me up. But when I was alone my government let me down," she told a committee of MPs meeting to discuss her case and those of other Canadians who've been disappointed by the federal government when they were in trouble abroad.

Mohamud has launched a \$2.5 million lawsuit against the government and, yesterday, Canada Border Services Agency executive vice-president Luc Portelance told the MPs' committee that "it would therefore be inappropriate to comment on matters touching

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on the litigation before the courts."

That meant that, while there were lots of explicit apologies from opposition MPs with no legal responsibility for the case, and veiled apologies from government MPs, a more detailed answer for why Mohamud was branded an imposter and cast out by the Canadian government will have to wait.

All she ever wanted to do was get back to her 12-year-old son, whose DNA match ultimately secured her passage back to Canada. Now, she says, young Mohamed Hussein has a persistent fear whenever his mother leaves his side, as she did Tuesday to come to Ottawa.

"It's really hard for him to trust that I'm coming back. What I did is I bought him a lot of games to help him to (stay occupied) while I'm away," she said after her testimony, before collapsing in tears.

Mohamud was detained and her passport was seized when she attempted to board a flight from Nairobi to Toronto May 21. She had been barred from leaving Kenya after authorities said her lips did not look the way they did in her four-year-old passport photo.

Two officials from the Canadian High Commission met her at the airport and showed her a picture of her son, but they didn't believe her when she insisted on her identity.

"They just told me, 'You are not Suaad,'" she recounted.

Two weeks after being arrested by Kenyan authorities, she met again with Canadian officials, showing them 16 pieces of identification and other proof of her citizenship.

"Again they told me, 'You are not Suaad.'"

Her Canadian employer, a Toronto courier firm, confirmed with both the High Commission in Nairobi on July 15 and an intelligence officer with Canada Border Services on July 22 that Mohamud was who she said she was, yet on July 24, Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon maintained in remarks to reporters that her claims to citizenship were unproven.

Len Edwards, the deputy minister of foreign affairs, insisted yesterday that standing up for the rights of citizens abroad was "a rule" and "a work ethic" within the department.

As Edwards spoke, a nervous-looking Mohamud walked into the Parliament Hill committee hearings and took a seat at the back of the room, where she almost certainly could not have heard the little that officials were prepared to offer up about her case.

While Foreign Affairs and the Canada Border Services Agency – the two responsible departments in this matter – have said they want to be as transparent as possible in probes now underway, Mohamud would have to consent to personal details of her life being made public in order for the results of the probes to be made public.

There has already been "a little change," Mohamud allowed after her testimony. That includes legislation being drafted by the New Democrats that would spell out how the government must act or react when Canadians are in trouble abroad and that would put an ombudsman in place to police the laws.

Whether a proposed bill to force the government to provide consular services to marooned citizens will get any support from other parties is another matter.

"It's already the law," said Liberal MP Joe Volpe, who represents Mohamud's Eglinton-Lawrence constituency. "If (the government has) broken the first law, what's to prevent them from breaking the second law?"

It appears, though, that Mohamud's case has spurred the government into some action, with the revelation yesterday that an autistic Somali-Canadian, Abdihakim Mohamed, is coming home after three years of citizenship limbo in Kenya.

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