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Tearful Canadian describes Kenyan ordeal

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Suaad Hagi Mohamud had a dozen pieces of ID with her in Kenya, but still failed to persuade federal officials of her identity, her Canadian citizenship and her right to return home to see her son.

Even the Canadian Tire money in her possession wasn't enough to prove that she was the rightful holder of a Canadian passport and not an imposter, as federal officials claimed after conducting an investigation.

In a powerful appearance before a parliamentary committee Wednesday, Ms. Mohamud laid out her numerous efforts to prove her identity in Kenya, where she had gone to see her mother.

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"I begged them to call my family in Canada, to call my workplace, but they did not. They just told me, 'You are not Suaad,' " said a frail and emotional Ms. Mohamud.

The Somali-Canadian was stranded for three months in Kenya, where she spent time in prison before finally being allowed back home earlier this month.

"I would never have believed that I would go to jail for saying that I am a Canadian," said Ms. Mohamud, who has launched a \$2.5-million lawsuit against the government.

Ms. Mohamud's story touched a number of MPs, but she did not get an apology from the government.

Conservative MP Brian Jean went on the offensive, trying to force Ms. Mohamud to immediately waive her privacy rights and allow the full release of the government investigation into her case.

"We've heard that she wants to be forthright and honest, but she is asking for \$2.5-million in taxpayers' money, and we have not heard whether or not she would release the findings to the committee," Mr. Jean said.

Ms. Mohamud's lawyer, Julian Falconer, was outraged by the question, stating that his client has nothing to hide. He added that the government, on the other hand, has not provided Ms. Mohamud with all of its information on her case.

"What a sad story that months later, having failed to do their jobs, [government officials] would somehow try to put the onus on her," Mr. Falconer told reporters. "To ask her to somehow agree to waive rights over things she hasn't seen is absurd."

Mr. Falconer added he would have liked Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon to be more mindful of Ms. Mohamud's privacy rights last month, when he publicly raised questions about her identity.

"All Canadians who hold passports generally have a picture that is identical in their passport to what they claim to be," Mr. Cannon said on July 24.

Opposition MPs are accusing the Harper government of providing a lower level of service to Canadians born abroad.

NDP MP Paul Dewar jokingly said in committee that the Canadian Tire money in Ms. Mohamud's possession "should have sealed the deal" and persuaded government officials of her identity.

More seriously, he added, rules have to be in place to prevent a repeat of the situation involving Ms. Mohamud, who finally proved her identity with a DNA test.

"What happened to you should never happen," Mr. Dewar said.

Ms. Mohamud said she suspects that the airline employees who first said that she did not look like her passport picture were looking for bribes. She said she was stunned when she found out that Canadian officials agreed.

"Instead of helping me, they told the Kenyans that I was an imposter. They gave the Kenyans my passport to help them charge me as a criminal," she said.