

TRANSCRIPT . DECEMBER 2009

## Abdullahi Ahmed: “You Can’t Go To College Without an ID.”

*Abdullahi Ahmed is a Kenyan journalism student.*

Why do you sometimes feel like you’re not Kenyan?

Let me just narrate what happened yesterday [Tuesday, November 10th 2009]. I went to the Starehe Constituency district office. I wanted to replace my lost ID. So, I went with my abstract and photocopy of my ID.

I met the registration officer there and he told me the Government has directed [them] to stop issuing - whether new or replacement - to any person of Somali origin, whether he was born in Kenya or he is from Somalia. I was shocked, because I thought I’d get my ID replacement very fast.

If the Government offices, or the system is corrupt, and I’m suffering because of that, then I had to doubt my whole “being Kenyan” stuff. Because if they issued ID cards to foreigners, how did that happen? It’s the Government to answer that, not me. But now, a whole province of over 130 square kilometers and a population of over a million are suffering because of that.

My cousin could not go to college because, right now there’s nobody issuing ID cards. And you can’t go to college without an ID. What

kind of pain does someone feel when you’ve gone to school for 12 years, you want to [pursue your career] and then you’re told, “You’re a Somali, and the government has stopped issuing ID cards because you’re Somali.”

If other Kenyans were in our shoes, what would [they] think?

My parents were born here, my grandfather was born in [present day] Mandera district in 1907. That is 100 years plus from my grandfather. If that cannot make me a Kenyan, and today other Kenyans of other origins are getting their replacement IDs, and I was denied that – I don’t see any reason I should call myself a Kenyan.

Being a Kenyan means enjoying the opportunities and the resources of this country equally with any other person. If you don’t get that, then it alienates you.

**Is it true that some youth are joining the militia in Somalia?**

How does somebody feel, that you’re going to be given money - Form Four leavers with C+ and above – to fight for militia miles away from Kenya? What has triggered

that person to have that attitude?

What has motivated him to have that kind of sentiment, to go and fight far away, when he knows that what he's going to fight against is not a *peremende*\* or something like that. It's a bullet, and one day he's going to die.

When you talk to some of them - some of my friends have gone and I speak to them, email them. Some of them are in Mogadishu, some of them are in other places. You talk to them, [they say] "I stayed in Kenya for the last fifteen, twenty years. What do I have to show?"

**How do these perceptions ultimately affect you?**

I [study] journalism, and when I go to class people see me as a pirate, as a warlord, as a militia, al-Shabab. In fact, some call me al-Shabab, including my close friends, even though they're joking.

I think if we do not kill that prejudice, if we do not remove that kind of stereotype, paranoia within us, and if the people of North Eastern [province do not] rise up for their rights, they will always remain the way they are, and they will always be denied even the simplest documents like the ID just because they look different.

If Kenya has to develop, we have to show our commonality. Today, people are talking about building a monument for Obama. Does he need it? When you have people suffering?

Our province is without roads, our hospitals are nothing but buildings. The internally displaced people are still suffering, sleeping in the cold in refugee camps, displaced within their own country.

If we don't look at the dynamics within ourselves, Kenyanism will always be a dream and it will not be realized.

*\*Peremende is Swahili for a sweet.*

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Abdullahi Ahmed is a Kenyan journalism student.