

Many Somalis Still See al-Shabab as Threat

Mohammed Yusuf

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A United Nations report this month said half of Somalia's population wants to leave the country despite security gains and the creation of a new government. Some Somalis who have fled still see the al-Qaida linked group al-Shabab as a threat to both their lives and the future of their country.

In 2008, Ismail Maalim Ahmed, was working with the World Health Organization (WHO) in Somalia's Bay region. That year, in July, he came under attack from al-Shabab.

"I was working with WHO as a health surveyor. Al-Shabab kidnapped me at a place which is 25 kilometers away from Baidoa and took me to a remote place. In the first place they deceived me by asking me a favor to give them a lift to some place. When we arrived at the village they told me to come out of the car at a gunpoint and they said to me I was infidel and a spy and they shot me nine times," Ahmed said.

Left to die, Ahmed struggled to walk for seven kilometers over eight hours. After a long ordeal he got help and he was taken to the town of Dinsoor. The next day he was airlifted to Nairobi for further treatment.

After three months staying in Nairobi he went back to Dinsoor. Ahmed says he wanted answers as to why al-Shabab wanted him dead.

But al-Shabab still saw him as a threat, and left him a message demanding he leave the country within 24 hours.

Ahmed's story is the example of the kind of pressure al-Shabab has put on Somalis to leave their own country.

The U.N. report says despite security gains made in the last two years, Somalis are not yet convinced things will change for better, and half of the population wants to seek refuge in other countries.

Lack of opportunities inside the country have also made easy for al-Shabab to recruit youths to fight for the group.

A Human Rights Watch report released in February noted the militant group has increasingly recruited children to strengthen its numbers. Families and children that resist the recruitment drive face severe consequences and even death.

Some parents whose sons have joined al-Shabab have found other alternatives to get their sons back without being detected by the militant group.

Thirty-year old AbdiKhadir Mohamed, who lives in Nairobi, has recently travelled back to Somalia to get his 12-year-old nephew who joined al-Shabab when his entire class joined.

Mohamed said he took the initiative to get the youngster back after his parents were so afraid from al-Shabab.

“I talked to the parents of the boy if they were comfortable with their son joining the group al-Shabab. They told me they were not okay with it. That’s when I decided I have to play the role of an uncle to save the boy whatever it takes. So that I can change his life and his future,” Mohamed said.

With al-Shabab in retreat now, losing large territories they once controlled, Mohamed says it is time for all Somalis to get their sons out of terror groups.

“Every one of us has to look ways to get our people back whatever it takes. We all know each other, we all live in the country, we know every district, town and village and we all know where our boys are stationed. They have to find solution to their sons before they are kille,” Mohamed said.

Despite al-Shabab losing ground in recent months Somalis are still worried about the threat posed by its members.

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