

Mahamoud Wardere Transcription

My name is Mahamoud Wardere and I was born and raised in Somalia. I was trained to be air traffic controller for Somali airports. I used to see the UNHCR office in Mogadishu, glass window with a notice which had a slogan that says "Everybody can be a refugee. It only takes natural disaster or man-made disaster." It was hard for me to believe. I used to stop by and see every day these words and reflect and think. At that time, Somalia was very peaceful especially the area I was. I could not imagine.

I saw immediately man-made disaster. It was terrible.

When the Somali Civil War happened, I was in Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia. Most of the people had to flee. The image that stayed with me for a long time was the seniors that could not run or could not walk. Their children had to carry them. You would be amazed how many seniors, who had been kept at home, had been exposed to the problem

After the Somali civil war, I emigrated from Somalia to the United States in 1993. I lived two years in Washington DC and then moved to Minnesota by train in the summer of 1995. Shortly there was a bus strike and no bus was available to ride. I walked to and from my Minnesota job in the mailroom as a mail sorter.

I worked for Minneapolis public schools for 7 and half years as a bilingual school-community liaison. During that time, I organized annual Somali education night events where I brought motivational speakers and community leaders, educators, students, parents together to encourage students to succeed in education. In addition to that speakers, I invited colleges to do college fairs.

In 2001, I ran for mayor of Minneapolis. The primary day started normally in the morning, and my name was in 150 polling place in Minneapolis. That day was September 11th, 2001. Then the tragedy happened in New York. Although I lost the election in the primary, I found myself being seen in the community as an emerging leader.

I was the first Somali American who ever ran for public office, not only in Minnesota but the whole United States of America. In 2001, the Minneapolis issues that were hot and all candidates were addressing were like this: 1) improving the police and community relations 2) creating and advocating for more affordable housing. I continued my advocacy for the community but, at this time, I worked through the system. I joined the staff for former Minnesota Senator Norm Coleman where I worked immigration and other cases for six years and a half.

Senator Norm Coleman did not win reelection and the recount process took almost six more months. When the court declared that my boss lost, I moved to a small town called Faribault where I run a small convenient grocery business. It did not work for me, so I sold that business and came back to the Twin Cities. I developed an interest of developing affordable housing, so I joined CommonBond Communities, which is the largest affordable Housing developer in Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin too. Currently I work for CommonBond Communities as an advantage service specialist. That means I connect residents with resources and volunteers to reach their goals.

I am married with four children.