

Wise Ali Transcription

“My Journey from Somalia to the US”

My name is Wise Ali. I was born in Mogadishu, Somalia. A few years after my birth, civil war broke out in my country. My family and I then fled to neighboring Kenya. On our journey to Kenya, we encountered several problems including hunger, danger from armed militias, and lack of transportation. My mother told me that we walked on foot for several days to get to the next town where transportation was available. There we stayed for about a couple of days to recover from the tiresome journey. The following day, we boarded a bus that was bound to Dogley, a border town in Kenya. But after a short drive, our bus was suddenly stopped by armed militia men. They ordered everyone to step out of the bus. They then separated men and women. All young men were killed, and then [they] took everything that the passengers had before letting us continue our journey.

Every one of us was terrified. We all thought we would be killed since there was no functioning security that maintained law and order across the nation. Sound of guns were heard throughout our journey. War was raging every town and city, and people were running to different directions seeking for safer places. Fortunately, we escaped the horrific scenes of Somalia and safely arrived at the Somali-Kenya border.

Upon arriving in Kenya, we were received by the Kenya boarder security and the UN refugee agency UNHCR. We were then transported to large camps designed for sheltering the thousands of refugees pouring into Kenya. We were provided with basic supplies such as blankets, clothes, cooking utensils, and mattresses. After a few months staying there, the camp was overwhelmed by the number of people arriving each day. The UNHCR then decided to build more refugee camps across the country to relocate some of the refugees. My family were among the first to be relocated to Utange refugee camp in Coast province in 1992. After a few years of relative peace and calmness, clashes erupted between the refugees and the local Kenyan citizens which eventually resulted in the closure of the camp in 1997. We were again moved to Kakuma refugee camp in Rift Valley province, where we stayed for 16 years.

Life in the refugee camp was hard. People live in hopeless situations. Their future is bleak because they are not educated and have no jobs. They endure all kinds of problems, like insecurity, hunger, rape, diseases, and have no experienced health workers and medical technologies in hospitals. Refugees are at risk because of the threats posed by armed local Kenyan citizens during nights. Their valuables are taken from them, and some are killed because there is no police or security guards that ensure their safety. It was a dangerous life in the camp.

Eventually, we were considered eligible for resettlement to a third country by UNHCR after the US government accepted their request to offer refugees a durable solution. We began screening processes to be determined whether we merited our

status by officials from the US Citizenship and Immigration Service. After going through a series of background checks and assessments, we were approved and granted resettlement. Finally, in November 2012, we arrived in the US. We started a new life. Everything seemed different: the culture, the life style, the accent, and the weather.

Although we first struggled to adopt to our new environment, we are now getting used to the system and despite being a tough challenge, the future seems promising. I'm a college student now. I want to study international relations, conflict resolution programs, and social work to be able to help other refugees in the future.

I choose to tell my story because I want people to know what it is like to be in a refugee camp.