

SOMALIA: Interview with Abdulahai Dahir, coordinator of Somali Reunification Women's Union

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NAIROBI, 14 June (IRIN) - Abdulahai Dahir, coordinator of Somali Reunification Women's Union (SRWU), works with displaced people in Bosasso. He tries to dissuade would-be migrants from risking the sea crossing by showing them graphic photographs of those who died attempting it. His organisation also helps distribute food to about 3,000 Ethiopians who are stranded and homeless in the port.

QUESTION: Why does Bosasso have such a huge number of displaced people in need of care?

ANSWER: Bosasso holds a huge population from various corners of the region. Movement of people started in 1992, when the Somali government collapsed. The majority of people who fled were IDPs [internally displaced persons] from the southern part of the country. But there are also foreigners, and they come because of the port. Now the majority of foreigners are Ethiopians, but previously Ethiopians were far less than Tanzanians and migrants from Asia.

Q: Many of these people get on small boats and die tragically at sea. What are the Bosasso authorities doing about it?

A: This tragedy cannot be stopped, for many reasons. First of all, there are so many people coming from Ethiopia, but nobody really knows what's behind it. Why is it happening? We have seen more and more coming from the various borders around Puntland.

You can see the Ethiopians are coming in a poor condition. They are not coming comfortably - they are coming by foot, by road, about 700 to 800 kilometres. So what we understand is that Bosasso is not their main destiny, not their goal. Their main aim is to travel to Yemen and Saudi Arabia, where they hope to get a better life and better job opportunities.

Q: Does the international community have a responsibility here?

A: The only way the international community can intervene in this situation is to assist with the local administration and provide vital

facilities and resources to tackle the problem, to train police and coast guards. We have to raise awareness so that people know of the dangers.

We get numbers of the deaths on the Yemeni beaches, and we go to the displaced camps and we tell people, we show pictures of the bodies. Since we started showing them, I think the numbers are decreasing. So many are youths, you know, they don't know anything. But we know there are some experienced and ruthless people backing it - saying you can go and get good jobs, have a good life - and encouraging them to take the risk.

[ENDS]