

ETHIOPIA-SOMALIA-YEMEN: Testimonies from Somalia

[This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations]

NAIROBI, 14 June (IRIN) - Testimonies from Somalia

With life in Somalia offering so little comfort and hope, some migrants risk crossing the Gulf of Aden to Yemen, not just once, but time and time again. More than 5,000 Somalis registered as refugees in Yemen in the first four months of 2006, and the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) believes many more travelled on, making their way to Saudi Arabia.

Jilibley Mohamed, 30, from southern Somalia

I have been deported nine times from Saudi Arabia and Yemen. We get put on planes or boats and taken to Mogadishu. The last time I got deported was in September [2005], just before Ramadan. I was working in Saudi Arabia for a water company.

I have done so many different jobs - I look after sheep and goats, work in the house or garden, wash cars. We do anything and can earn about US\$100 month.

Life is too difficult in Mogadishu. I went to Mogadishu because I thought I could find work there or do business, but you just survive. There are no jobs, and there is insecurity. I have two children - a boy and a girl - but I have divorced my wife. She is also looking for work. My parents look after the two children in Jowhar, where I was born.

We have been waiting here [on the beach] for two nights now, but we will go tonight. The owner says he can put 90 of us in the boat, and we have to squeeze together and sit still. We must sit still. We are allowed to carry three litres of water to drink, and we can take some dates to eat. It takes 36 hours to get to Yemen on these small boats. I have done it before. You just take your luck. What will happen will happen.

Ali Mohamed, 16, from Mogadishu

I'm going to Yemen. I can go to the camps or I can look for work. Anything I do is better than Somalia. I come from Mogadishu, where there is no work, no education, no money, no health - it is not a life

for me. We have no government in Somalia. I have never lived with government, so I don't know what it is like. I think it could make things better for the youth, like me, so we can have a future in our own country.

I talked to people in Mogadishu who worked in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and they told me you can earn US\$1 or \$2, even up to \$5 a day. I can work as a labourer, or in construction, or work in the houses and gardens if there is a position. Or I can get work in the ports.

My family knows I have come here, and they helped me get the money. They encouraged me to make the journey because it is good to work and get money from abroad. We can send money back to them. The brokers tell you it is easy to get to Bosasso and across the sea. Many, many people have done it. I have already paid the 500,000 Somali shillings [US\$36] for the boat to the smugglers here. I paid money before to another and waited for two months. But we know this one is good - the boat is there. I know it is dangerous. Yes, people die sometimes. We take our luck. It is in God's hands.

Abdulahai Ali Yusuf, 27, from Mogadishu

I work as a painter in Mogadishu, but life is very difficult. I come from a minority clan. People don't treat you well. I live with my family, but it is very difficult to earn money and survive. If you get sick you cannot afford the private hospitals, so you suffer and pray. We can't buy drugs. There are some days you live in fear. Anything can happen on the street - there is no control.

Everyone knows about Bosasso and the boats. We collected money together so I could look for work. I travelled for eight days in a truck through Galkayo to get to Bosasso. You pay the 'hambaar' [smuggler] in Mogadishu. It is well known, and the trucks are there.

I have done this before. It took three days and two nights on a small boat, and there were no problems. I got from Yemen to Saudi Arabia and got work there. I took any job. But they have this thing called government, and after a few months I got arrested and deported back to Mogadishu. I was put on a plane.

Yesterday, the smugglers brought us here and told us to wait, but I don't see any boats here. I paid US\$50 for the boat. We don't know why it is only the five of us and no one else is waiting. The smugglers will be bringing more people in a truck, I think, but maybe we will give up and go back to Bosasso.

[ENDS]