

MP slams government for woman's Kenyan nightmare

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By Lisa Queen

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Keeping his fingers crossed that Suaad Hagi Mohamud will return from her ordeal in Kenya as early as this weekend, Eglinton-Lawrence MP Joe Volpe is blasting the Canadian government for sabotaging the North York mother's three-month appeal to come home.

"I've been in this game for 20 years. This is the worst I've ever seen," said Volpe, who has worked behind the scenes in an effort to pressure the government to bring Mohamud home from Kenya, where she has been stranded since May.

"This is the first time the Government of Canada has deliberately gone out to discredit one of its own citizens and used a foreign government to do its dirty work for them."

The actions of the government go beyond "gross incompetence" and "mismanagement" because officials actively worked against a citizen who had done nothing wrong, Volpe charged.

"I'm getting more and more angry with every passing day," he said.

He believes the situation got so out of hand because after an initial error was made, the Canadian government kept trying to cover up its mistakes while only digging itself a deeper hole.

Speaking to reporters on Thursday Aug. 13, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said the government's first priority is to bring Mohamud home. He also said Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan has asked Canada Border Services Agency for a full accounting of its role in the incident.

Mohamud's troubles began on May 21 when the Lawrence Heights resident attempted to fly home to Toronto from the Kenyan capital of Nairobi.

An airport official accused the 31-year-old single mother of a 12-year-old boy of not looking like her four-year-old passport photo.

Mohamud, a Canadian citizen born in Somalia, tried to prove her identity at the Canadian High Commission, producing her Ontario's driver's license, OHIP card, social insurance card, Canadian citizenship certificate, credit cards, bank cards, drugstore card and a letter from her employer.

Not only did officials not believe her, they sent her cancelled passport to Kenyan immigration officials to assist them in prosecuting her.

She spent eight days in jail before a friend posted bail.

Federal officials in Canada suggested she had switched identities with a relative.

Despite pleas by Mohamud to check her fingerprints or test her DNA, Volpe said the Canadian government put up one road block after another.

This week, results of a DNA test, only conducted after Mohamud went to federal court last month to force Canada to check her DNA, proved the woman stranded in Nairobi is Mohamud.

In June, Volpe met with Mohamud's distraught son and other family members. His office had already been working on the woman's case.

Volpe said he tried several routes to seek help for Mohamud, including writing letters and speaking personally with cabinet ministers.

He even pushed the government to track down the whereabouts of the "legitimate" holder of the passport if, as officials insisted, an imposter was holding Mohamud's document.

His efforts fell on deaf ears, he said.

Friday morning, Mohamud is scheduled to appear in a Nairobi court, where Canadian officials are expected to testify she is the rightful owner of the passport.

But there remains several outstanding issues to resolve, not the least of which is paying for a plane ticket home, according to Volpe. He is hoping the Canadian government will pay her fare.

Calling the ordeal "mindboggling," Volpe said he has spoken to Mohamud by phone a few times.

"She couldn't believe this was happening to her. It is incredible," he said

"Talk about testing your love for the country (Canada). But it is not the country that has gone after her, it is the incompetents in the government's cabinet."