



'I went through a horrible time'; Diplomats labelled her impostor, woman tells hearing

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Suaad Hagi Mohamud, the Toronto woman suing the federal government for \$2.5 million after being detained in Kenya for three months, sparked an explosive partisan storm when she tearfully recounted her ordeal on Parliament Hill on Wednesday.

In a special session of the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Mohamud gave heartfelt testimony about how at least five diplomats with the Canadian High Commission in Kenya falsely labelled her an impostor, leaving her abandoned by her country.

"I want to make sure what happened to me does not happen to any other Canadian," the 31-year-old woman told the hearing, which was called after a series of high-profile cases involving Canadians in trouble abroad that have put the Conservative government on the defensive.

Conservative MPs Peter Goldring and Brian Jean tried to persuade Mohamud to waive her privacy rights in the two government probes that have been called into the bungling of her case.

Mohamud's lawyer, Julian Falconer, seated next to his client, said it was "an exercise in the absurd" for government MPs to ask her to waive her rights on a document she had yet to read, and he later accused them of playing politics with her case.

"We have not heard a direct answer about whether Ms. Mohamud will release the findings of the report to this committee ... she is asking for \$2.5 million in taxpayers money," Jean said after Falconer objected on behalf of Mohamud.

"Ms. Mohamud has nothing to hide," Falconer told the Conservative MPs. "To ask her before she gets a shred of paper ... that is unfair."

Liberal Joe Volpe, Mohamud's MP, hinted the question was an attempt to intimidate her.

"There is a veiled attempt to indicate to this committee ... that there is something in those two investigations, which might make you feel uncomfortable or that you did something which was wrong and illegal and it will come out in the public," Volpe said.

With Parliament in its summer recess, opposition MPs pressed the government for a special session of the Commons foreign affairs committee to "study the treatment of Canadians abroad."

"I went through a horrible time," Mohamud said.

Reading from a prepared statement, Mohamud recalled her eight-day ordeal in a Kenyan jail and how Canadian diplomats refused to believe who she really was. She desperately showed them various pieces of identification, and even pulled out dry cleaning receipts and Canadian Tire money.

"You are not Suaad," she said diplomats repeatedly told her.

The hearing also heard how Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon publicly expressed doubts on July 24 about Mohamud's identity, something Falconer said amounted to "tainting" his client.

Mohamud is suing the federal government for \$2.5 million after she was detained for three months in Kenya on May 21 after what was supposed to be a three-week trip.

After the Canadian High Commission in Nairobi branded Mohamud an impostor, Kenya prosecuted her for allegedly using a fraudulent passport after an airline employee refused to let her board an aircraft back to Canada, saying she didn't resemble her passport photo.

Despite having other identification, Mohamud was forced to prove her identity through a DNA test.