

Man detained in Somalia is stripped of UK citizenship for refusing to spy on Muslims

By Jean Shaoul
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The British government has stripped Mahdi Hashi, a 23-year-old British national who also held Somali nationality, of his UK citizenship. It is one of at least 13 such cases, mostly carried out by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, since 2006.

Hashi's family and friends insist that the government's action was in response to his refusal to become an informant for MI5, Britain's security service.

Last summer, the Home Office claimed in a letter to his parents in London that Hashi was a threat to UK national security due to his "extremist" activities. The letter stated the decision was made in part on the basis of secret evidence, which "should not be made public in the interest of national security."

The young man, a care worker in the Kentish Town Community Organisation, was born in Somalia and came to London with his family when he was five. According to CagePrisoners, the human rights group headed by Moazzam Begg, who was illegally held at Bagram airbase and Guantanamo Bay before being released without charge in 2005, Hashi had been subject to continual harassment by MI5.

When he was 19, an MI5 officer at Gatwick airport warned him against travelling to Somalia to visit his sick grandmother. Hashi told the *Independent* in 2009, "He warned me not to get on the flight. He said 'Whatever happens to you outside the UK is not our responsibility.' I was absolutely shocked."

Either he worked for the security service or he would face detention and harassment in the UK and overseas. He was detained at the airport at Djibouti and later deported, allegedly at Britain's request and without explanation. On his return to London, he was detained again. He was subsequently bombarded with phone

calls urging him to spy on his fellow Muslims if he wanted his terror suspect status lifted.

Hashi refused to work for MI5. He complained to the police, the Investigatory Powers Tribunal—the body that oversees MI5—and his MP, Labour's Frank Dobson, to no avail. He also spoke to the media in a bid to protect himself.

Four of Hashi's friends—all of Somali origin—also explained their experiences when they were approached by MI5, who tried to coerce them into working for it.

Mohamed Nur, said, "One day they, the MI5 officers, came to my house pretending to be postmen. When I let them in they accused me of being an extremist. They said the only way to remove that taint from my name is if you work for us, otherwise wherever you go we can't protect you... We perceived it as blackmail."

Abshir Ahmed said, "I felt bullied. I don't want to work with MI5 so they should just leave me alone."

When Adydarus Elmi, a 23-year-old cinema worker from north London, arrived at Chicago's O'Hare airport with his pregnant wife, they were separated, questioned and deported back to Britain. Three days later he was to go to Charing Cross police station about his travel documents. He said, "I met a man and a woman. She said her name was Katherine and that she worked for MI5. I didn't know what MI5 was."

He was questioned for two-and-a-half hours in an attempt to get him to work for MI5. He added, "She would regularly call my mother's home asking to speak to me, and she would constantly call my mobile."

The agent telephoned his home at 7 in the morning to congratulate him on the birth of his baby girl. His wife was still seven months pregnant and the couple had expressly told the hospital that they did not want to

know the sex of their child. He said that she threatened him saying, “If you do not want anything to happen to your family you will co-operate.”

None of the men were ever charged with an offence and Hashi’s family and friends reject the accusation he was an extremist. MI5’s harassment prompted him to return to Somalia, where he looked after his sick grandmother. He later married and had a child there.

At about the same time as the family received the letter from the Home Office revoking his citizenship, Hashi was taken into custody. A man who had been released from a prison in Djibouti told them that Hashi had been held alongside him in Naggar prison, where he was mistreated before being taken away by American forces. It is not known when, where or by whom he was arrested.

Mohamed Hashi, Hashi’s father, told *Russia Today*, “He [the fellow prisoner] told us that he had been fingerprinted and that DNA has been taken from him. The Americans, when they found out he was British citizen, contacted the British consulate and the British consulate said ‘we have already removed British citizenship from him.’ And the Americans took him somewhere, somewhere we don’t know.”

His family fear that he may have been taken to Camp Lemonier, in Djibouti, the notorious US anti-terrorist base that is part of the American extraordinary rendition programme whereby suspects are taken to third-party states to be illegally detained, interrogated and tortured.

Since the invasion of Somalia by Ethiopia in 2006, the US has expanded the base at Camp Lemonier and its operations in the Horn of Africa. Young British Muslims who are from or linked to the Horn of Africa are being profiled as likely to be involved as Islamic militants and subject to targeting by the police and security forces.

The British government has refused to give the family any assistance in finding their son because he is no longer a citizen. Lawyers acting on behalf of the family have asked the Home Office to explain where he is being held and the charges against him. But the government refused to say anything at all, stating, “It has been the policy of successive governments neither to confirm nor deny speculation, allegations or assertion in respect of intelligence matters.”

By revoking Hashi’s citizenship, the government is

issuing a warning to young Muslims that failure to spy for MI5 will have serious consequences. It is also seeking to absolve itself from any responsibility for his safety, under conditions where he is certain to be subjected to illegal and inhuman treatment at the US base.

Home Secretary Theresa May can strip anyone with dual citizenship of their British citizenship without a court order if she believes it to be “conducive to the public good,” a test historically applied to non-Britons facing deportation. This little-known power was included in the 2006 Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act rushed through in the wake of the July 2005 London bombings that killed 52 people.

Previously, British citizenship of a dual national could only be revoked under the stricter test of being “seriously prejudicial to the vital interests of the UK,” which usually meant spying.

According to data obtained by the *Guardian* last year under the Freedom of Information Act, five of the dual nationals deprived of their citizenship were British Pakistanis and two were of dual British and Sudanese nationality. The remaining six were Australian (David Hicks, another Guantanamo detainee), Iraqi, Russian, Egyptian and Lebanese dual nationals.

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