

Woman sues Ottawa for Kenya stranding

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Suaad Hagi Mohamud, who had been stranded in Kenya, is suing the federal government for \$2.6 million over her ordeal. (CBC)

A Toronto woman who had been stranded in Kenya over false claims she was an impostor is suing the Canadian government for \$2.6 million, accusing officials of "callous and reckless treatment."

"I don't care about money," Suaad Hagi Mohamud said on Friday during a news conference in Toronto. "I only go to court so this never happen[s] to another Canadian citizen."

Mohamud, 31, who was visiting her mother in Kenya, had been unable to leave the country since May, when local authorities said her lips did not look the way they did in her four-year-old passport photo.

"I told them I'm a Canadian so call my government. I thought my government would back me up," she said. "I was alone when my government let me down."

Canadian consular officials called her an impostor, voided her passport and urged Kenyan officials to prosecute her, even after Mohamud handed over numerous pieces of identification,

offered fingerprints and finally demanded that her DNA be tested. She was charged on May 28 with identity fraud.

The lawsuit against government officials, filed in a Toronto court on Friday, said it comes in response to "callous and reckless treatment of [Mohamud] while she was abroad."

"As a result of the defendants' actions, Ms. Mohamud was robbed of her identity, denied her rights as a Canadian citizen and abandoned to the whims of Kenyan authorities," according to the lawsuit, filed in a Toronto court on Friday.

The legal action says Mohamud and her family suffered "severe damages, including ... loss of reputation, physical and psychological injuries, mental distress, loss of income and special damages."

As well, Mohamud's 12-year-old son also suffered the "shock and trauma of not knowing when, if ever, his mother would return home," the lawsuit alleges.

None of the allegations have been proven in court.

After a DNA test proved Mohamud was who she said she was, a Kenyan judge agreed to drop the charges, which included using another person's passport and being in Kenya illegally. Mohamud returned to Toronto and was reunited with her son, Mohamed Hussein, 12, on Saturday.

Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon said an investigation could be completed within a month.

The Canada Border Services Agency has also launched an internal investigation into how the case was handled.

The claim states that Cannon "intentionally and/or negligently" failed to direct Foreign Affairs officials to conduct a competent investigation of Mohamud's case.

It also accuses Cannon of intentionally defaming Mohamud by implying to reporters that she was dishonest, committed criminal misconduct and that she was not who she said she was.

Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan and Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney are also named in the suit. They are accused of not taking adequate steps to repatriate Mohamud and knowing that officials in their departments were engaged in misconduct.

With files from The Canadian Press