



## Lifeline: The Ongoing Need for Temporary Protected Status for Somalia

### Fawzia's\* story

Fawzia\* was forced to flee war in Somalia at age 18, leaving everything and everyone she knew. Two members of her immediate family, her father and her brother, were killed in the violent conflict. Fawzia and other relatives found temporary refuge in Kenya before Fawzia fled yet again—this time for the United States. After a long and harrowing trip to South America, and then through Mexico, she finally arrived at the U.S. border at age 21. Like many TPS holders, although she needed protection from war and the humanitarian crisis in her home country, she was eventually found not to meet all of the requirements for asylum.

In 2001, Somalia was redesignated for Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, allowing Fawzia to apply and receive protection. While she said life with only a temporary status is difficult in many ways, TPS has allowed her to build a great life with her wonderful husband in Georgia. Because of TPS, she was previously able to own her own business. “With TPS, I have the ability to work and drive freely without fearing arrest,” Fawzia said. “TPS is not a permanent solution, but it has been critical in my life. It has allowed me to work and support others. I am a lifeline [to friends and family in Somalia]. I am providing food, medical, housing, things of basic life. But they are really struggling.” She added, “Somalia is fragile. They are still recovering and they have a lot of recovery to do.” In addition to the protracted conflict, she notes cycles of severe drought and flooding, which have contributed to the humanitarian crisis.

When asked what she thinks would happen to her and her family if TPS ends and she is forced to return to Somalia, Fawzia said, “I am better off dead than going back. It is a death sentence. Every single day people are dying there and I am no different than any of them.” She continues, “I am a woman as well,” alluding to the use of sexual and gender-based

violence as a weapon of war in Somalia, as well as the other vulnerabilities women face. “Women, children and really all civilians are at risk and being targeted. Somalia is not a place to send anyone.”

Fawzia concluded with a plea to U.S. government decision makers: “I am fearful of the same people that I fled. I cannot go back to Somalia, especially with my American identity being that I have been in the U.S. for 20 years. It would put my life at risk. I am appealing to the decision makers. Do not return me and send me to my death.”

## Ibrahim’s story

At 10 years old, Ibrahim was forced to flee war in Somalia with his mother and sister. His father was killed in the escalating violence. For several years, they lived in a refugee camp before relocating to Nairobi, where the young Ibrahim began working as a dishwasher to support his family.

In 2000, Ibrahim left Kenya with the help of an uncle, traveling to Mexico to seek asylum in the United States. The asylum process was complex. “I didn’t speak English at the time,” recalled Ibrahim. “I didn’t have a good interpreter.” At a court appearance, a cousin sitting in the audience later remarked that Ibrahim’s interpreter had not properly translated his words and story. Following further complications and an attorney who failed to file an appeal on time, Ibrahim’s pathway to asylum was closed. Fortunately, another attorney in Tennessee—where Ibrahim eventually settled—saw that Ibrahim would be eligible for TPS and helped him apply in 2001.

Ibrahim said life since then has “been a roller coaster. You have to stay positive.” Ibrahim is married and has two stepchildren. He works as a delivery driver and his wife is a nurse. In his free time, Ibrahim volunteers at his local mosque, where he serves food to the homeless and helps with other initiatives to assist low-income people in his community. He thinks often of his mother and sister, who now live in Djibouti, never able to return to Somalia given its ongoing insecurity.

If TPS for Somalia were to end, Ibrahim said, “It would be devastating. I can’t even picture it. In Somalia, you can die at any time. There is nothing for me there.” He expects his family would be separated. “I don’t want [my wife] to go there. Her life would be in danger. I wouldn’t want her in that situation.”

He hopes that at the upcoming decision on TPS for Somalia, the acting Homeland Security secretary will give him and others in his situation “a chance and a life.” Ibrahim reflected on the past few decades when he has been protected through TPS: “The U.S. gave me opportunity. I obey the law, pay my taxes. This is the country I know and love.”

## Ahmed’s\* story

When war broke out in Somalia, Ahmed,\* his wife and two children fled to neighboring Kenya seeking safety. After some time in a refugee camp, Ahmed traveled to South Africa and then to the United States. He was eventually found to be ineligible for asylum, but received protection through TPS. After his wife passed away in Kenya, Ahmed eventually remarried. He remains in close contact with his children, who are still in the Kenyan refugee camp. They cannot return to Somalia. “They would be forced to join the terrorist group Al-Shabaab,” he said, “It isn’t secure for youth.”

Ahmed, now around 60-years-old and living in Ohio, works in a warehouse to support his wife, who is now retired, and their 17-year-old son, a U.S. citizen. He also plays an active role in his local mosque. “TPS allows me to work, provide for family, drive,” he said. “Without TPS, I cannot do all of that. TPS gives me freedom. Without it I am nothing.”

If TPS ends and Ahmed is forced to go back to Somalia, he said, “I will be targeted by terrorists because I come from the United States.” If his family returned with him, he fears they would also be killed. Even if they remain in the United States, he worries about their security and their future. Without his salary to pay the rent, “I fear they would be homeless.”

When asked what he would say to the acting Homeland Security secretary if he had the chance, Ahmed thinks not only of his family, but of all the other families in his position. “There are hundreds of [Somalis] with TPS. All of us have families. We are providers. Without TPS, we will have a hard life.”

## Mohamed’s story

Mohamed, a former Somali TPS holder, said, “TPS meant a lot to me. I could work, drive, it helped me to go to school, and educate myself.” Mohamed escaped from Somalia in 2007 at 19 after being kidnapped by Al-Shabaab. “One night they kidnapped me and took me to a back room and questioned me,” he recalled. “They told me to join them and then let me go for a few days. I decided to flee to Kenya.”

In the United States, Mohamed applied for asylum but was eventually found ineligible. Through TPS, he was able to remain in the United States protected from the threats that awaited him in Somalia. He built a life, eventually marrying and starting a family.

In 2019, Mohamed was able to get a green card and permanent residency in the United States, but he continues to advocate for TPS for Somalia. “Yesterday, there was a bombing where my parents live in Mogadishu,” Mohamed said, outlining the ongoing dangers in Somalia. “As we speak, they have fled to a rural area outside the city.” Mohamed was also personally impacted by the Dec. 28 bombing in Mogadishu, which killed almost 80 people and wounded nearly 150 others. It was the largest attack carried out by Al-Shabaab in two years. “My cousin was killed,” Mohamed said. “He was a student, going to school. Him and many other students.”

Mohamed points to the particular threat for people in Somalia who have lived in the United States. “People who have been deported to Somalia from the U.S. or Europe are killed by Al-Shabaab. If they are not killed, they are isolated from society, they have no work. This would apply to any TPS holder.” The ongoing droughts and floods also have had a devastating affect on food security, he said.

\*Names have been changed to protect identity