

HANEEN: Okay the date is May 12th, We are at the East African Cultural Center in City heights and this is the beginning of the interview. So the first question is asking for introductions, what is your name and what is your role here at the United Womens of East Africa Support Team?

KAFISA: My name is Kafisa Mohamed. I work here as like outreach. Also I work with children here to overlook and you know, give food and prepare food with the community engagement.

H: How long have you been working here?

K: Hmm, I think almost 9 years.

H: How did you find about it (UWEAST)... how did you get involved?

K: First I would come like...when there were community meetings and would get involved, listen, participate. Advocacy. That's how I started.

H: Have you always been in San Diego City Heights area? Or were you in other places before here.

K: First I came here, and then I went four years in Ohio. In Columbus. Then I came back. I like San Diego. Its the weather I like. It's hot most of the time, so that's good.

H: Do you have a family?

K: Yes Yes. I have a family. Two boys. Big boys now. Twenty and Sixteen. And a husband too.

H: How long have you been in San Diego or in the United States total?

K: I came 1998. Till now. I think it's like 21 years? Almost 21 years I think,

H: Before, where did you migrate from?

K: Somalia.

H: When you came here did you find the community right away? Did you have relatives here? Or did you come with your family?

K: Oh I didn't come with my family. But the community was always here.

H: What was it like at that time?

K: It's like, you don't know English. You don't drive. You think everything is different. Culture shock. You can't talk to other people because of the English.

H: And what kind of helped you through that process in the beginning?

K: Yeah, so I started going to school. ESL. Learning English takes me a long time. Even now I'm still learning.

H: And you mentioned you went to Columbus, Ohio? What prompted that?

K: Because San Diego... it was hard to get a job, and especially when you don't know the language. So Over there has more opportunity to work...to get the work... even if the English isn't there. So that's why I went there. I get work...I worked and come back after four years.

H: And you said you came back to San Diego because you liked it better?

K: Yeah. I like San Diego better. The weather.

H: And then you mentioned having two sons. What was it like raising them in a new country? I know there's a lot of fears that mothers have especially when raising their children in the U.S. How did you feel?

K: I know. I didn't have children in my country, so maybe I'm a little different than someone who had the country children and then come here and see other children raised. But this is...my children.. they're born here. Still now we are good. We don't have problems. But it's hard. You have to work and you know..earn money and you want to stay with your kids. So you have to take them maybe to daycare or school while you're working or you're studying. You know...it's hard. We overcome.

H: Do you feel like there's a gap because because you were raised in a different and your children are from completely different culture than you...Would you say there's a gap sometimes between you and your children or did they take on your culture and were able to....

K: I think they are half half. Because they are here. And Sometimes it's also language barrier. Because they are born here they know English. Its their first language Sometimes I can't tell everything if I want to talk to them in Somali...everything they may not understand. Or if I take to some places in English, they can translate. But they still speak...they speak Somali too. It's not fluently.

H: Have you been able to return to Somalia after you came to San Diego?

K: No. Not yet. I would like to...take even my children there but I don't feel a safe place.

H: And when you came to the U.S, what was the main thing that brought you to the United States?

K: We had Civil War in my country. The main thing was I was looking for a safer place to stay.

H: And was the immigration process easy? Or was it difficult.

K: Yeah it was not easy. It was difficult. Alhamdulillah. We have everything.

H: What would you say are some of the more positive parts of coming here and raising your children here?

K: Um. I feel safe. And you get work...you can work. RAISE your children in a safe place. Their education. An opportunity to get education.

H: Do you have children in university right now?

K: Yeah...I have. In college. Mesa College. My older one. My younger one is in Preuss.

H: Oh that's nearby.

K: Yes. It's nearby.

H: And what are some of your hopes for the future whether its for yourself or for your family?

K: My future is just my children. To finish university. And to work a good job. So they can live better. And they can also help others.

H: And given that this is a community center. I'm sure you've found other people in very similar positions so has that helped you throughout the years figuring things out? Through the other women in the community?

K: Ah yes, so you mean when sometimes you don't know what to do? Or where to go? So if you ask the community someone can help you. There's of course course when I come here I asked like...Sahra or someone that worked here. They say this is what I need, what I can do, where I can do. So that has helped. Even other people can come here and ask questions.

H: What is your favorite part of working here? I know you prepare lots of the food and do a lot of work here. So what is the most enjoyable part of this?

K: The most enjoyable part is...I'm Muslim, so I pray five times. So whenever comes prayer time, I don't have any problems. Maybe some jobs, if you get other jobs it can be hard to get the place where you can pray. Or the bathroom, when you take Whudu. So here I just feel like home.

H: And have you worked a job that for example...didn't let you take a break for prayer or...

K: I worked jobs like...not praying it was hard. But I would still pray. But sometimes you have to go quick and also one job I get it, I quit it because of my clothes. They told me to wear pants. And I don't wear pants., I wear my pants under but I don't wanna wear only pants. Then I quit that job and worked another job where I could wear a skirt.

H: And that job..I'm assuming you told them I have to dress like this for religious reasons -

K: Yeah.

H: And they still said no?

K: Yeah the supervisor at that time told me "this is risk...you can wear these clothes but it has to be shorter". Then I told her I cannot make it shorter. Then I decided not to go anymore. Quit. And I find another job.

H: And would you say that's a common experience in the community? With jobs not accommodating Islamic rules/./.

K: Yeah, yeah. It happens to others I hear yeah. Sometimes. They cannot pray. Or sometimes Friday prayers is a problem...getting two hours. Mhmm. That happens. But many people understand. Before it was more harder. But now it's better than before. So so many people understand the religion and they let you pray on your time.

H: I know that's definitely an issue my family his face. Like getting Eid off, and having to work. It sounds like a problem across the entire country.

K: Yeah, and for us. You cannot work on Eid day. It's prohibited. Not all day, but at least you have to pray the Eid and then maybe come back. But we feel it's not good because we know when other people...when they have Christmas, they are off. There's no work...and even it's not entirely off, these companies have to understand holidays off that day. I wish they understand.

H: And you said it was harder before. So I'm assuming in the early 2000's there were things that happened like 9/11 where people were not as like...they didn't treat Muslims as well. Would you say that was part of the reason it was more difficult before? When people were

K: For me, no. Because it was the language and the clothes. So that was same thing. But one thing, people, like non-Muslims, they more understand. Why we wearing, why we're praying. So they let you, you know, do it. I know...after 9/11...so many people they were scared I saw them wearing hijab..and some people I even saw take it off,,the hijab...because they scared. I never took it off and I was just wearing it. I believe whatever will happen to me, nobody can stop me. So it was for that reason.

H: And would you say your children have also faced similar hardships, or is it easier for them in general because in terms of the religious discriminaiton, people not respecting religion

K: Yeah. My children...they never talked me or I never saw any discrimination. Most schools they go are mixed. Asian. Everyone. And we live in this community, everybody lives [here]. We are multi-culture. So I never see that. But when I had a child. I took it one time do one doctor...what she did was...my son he has diabetic, the oldest one. At that he was young...I don't know...maybe 5 years something like that. So I used to live in Ohio. The doctor he used to listen and I used to speak my English ..I didn't know...I was not talking even like now, my English was bad. He was listening and understanding...When they need they take translation.But when I come here I went children, one lady was doctor for my son. I went to an appointment and she said "Next time bring translation because I can't understand you." I had so many years that doctor will understand me and if he had problem maybe he look for someone to translate. And I changed from her because she has to give me the translation. If she don't understand she *has* to bring someone, not me. That I'm low income... I couldn't...How i can pay someone...Then I stop her and I went to other doctors. The other doctors were better. Uh huh.

H: Yeah it's definitely the responsibility of the doctor to bring someone.

K: Yeah. that time I felt she discriminating me in my language. this is her job. I didn't know English to defend myself. To talk.

H: And so now you would say you don't really like... have these issues in general?.

K: No. My children they grow. And My son he goes doctor himself. He's big now. and I learned more english. Even I help sometimes my community when they need. Even though I'm not still perfect. I try my best.

H: And so you talked a lot about you learning English, and learning how to integrate into the life and culture here. What about for example, you wanting your children or the folks here at the community center to keep their culture. So what would you say that is like?

K: To keep our culture?

H: Yeah.

K: We talk, we tell stories. I tell my stories, how culture, we tell them we are Muslim and we fast. My children they fast, alhamdulillah. They pray. Even though sometimes they may not pray because they have difficulty with school but what I like is to say "Wherever you are, Allah is looking not pray for me. You don't benefit. Pray for Allah". They love fasting. Fasting is not a problem. But it's hard sometime in the morning when they wake up and pray. That's what I tell them. Whatever, just do it for the sake of Allah. Not for me. Do good things. Don't Lie. Be better with your community. And for others. Respect each other. So all that. And other kids, they are here too.

H: Same thing?

K: Same. Mhm.

H: And it is mostly you try to teach them about Islam or do you teach them about the other parts -

K: My children or other children?

H: Anyone.

K: So here, I don't teach. My role is just to do the kitchen. To prepare some food and to overwatch the other people. And they teach like...sometimes. Because its mixed here. They teach them educationally. But my children, I tell them...Our culture is like that, like sometime, marrying we talk...If you meet a girl, you have to go to her family...We have to talk to her family...and her family, they have to agree. When they agree, we have to give some money. So I talk.

H: And do you, for example, also tell...like for example when I was growing up my family would always tell me stories about their life in Sudan and how it was like... do you also do the same for your children?

K: Mhm. Yeah. I tell them about my country. What I used to do. And I...when I was young...I even used to not cover. Then... becoming an adult..nobody forced me..but just myself I decided this is the

Islamic way and we want to just do good deeds to go through Jannah later. Then I tell them boys too. To do good deeds. Learn your Quran. We teach them. And learn for your Dunya. You need to go to school, to go to work, you need to benefit for later. You will get family. Give them, and give others. Charity too. That's how I teach.

H: And when you were here did you for example, take them to Islamic School or Dugsi or something similar.

K: Not now. When they become big! [Laughs] Mostly they don't go. But yes. I take them to teach Quran in Dugsi. Young age, they learned. They didn't finish. But still I tell them, read quran. Read to me. Correct them. Still they do. They go to Taraweeh now. Ramadan. They like to go to Taraweeh. I say to my son, you have school tomorrow. You still want to go tonight or you want to stay? And he says "No! I want to go". It's not obligated to pray Taraweeh. so It's optional. But he'll say "Oh I wanna go!"

H: So I know the center changes it's hours during Ramadan. so what is it like during Ramdan. Is it more community? More than the rest of the year, or is it the same.

K: What's different. So you know, everybody has a role. our role is in the kitchen. And most children, they now come during the weekend. Because after they come from school, it's hard..the children most of them they are fasting, then it's hard you know... to stay here. So they wanna stay with their families. Maybe eat with their families. So now they come weekends, to do the roles, and then play and then they can go early. And sometimes, we can make only Afuur. They can eat. We still provide food. So if somebody's not fasting, they may eat. If they fasting, they can take home and eat later.

H: Is there anything else you would like to add or share? I mean this is -

K: Mmm. I think I did. Thank you!

H: Okay, well thank you so much for sharing your story.

K: No problem. Thank you for interviewing me.