



Young Somalis fear CSIS is targeting them

BY LOUISA TAYLOR, OTTAWA CITIZEN JANUARY 5, 2010



Members of Ottawa's Somali-Canadian community protest on Parliament Hill in this 2007 file photo. Members of that community are now saying that their youth were targeted by security officials in the run-up to the inauguration of Barack Obama, a practice that still continues.

Photograph by: Chris Mikula, Ottawa Citizen

OTTAWA — Members of Ottawa's Somali community say their youth were targeted by security officials in the run-up to the inauguration of Barack Obama, and the targeting continues more than a year later, causing deep mistrust in the community.

Community activist Mohamed Sofa, 27, says he knows of 10 separate cases from the past 18 months in which CSIS has approached young, male Somali-Canadians in Ottawa.

"For some it was a phone call asking them to come to CSIS and talk, for others it was a visit at home or at their workplace, unannounced," says Sofa. "They said the questions asked were very general and vague — 'Did you go to this lecture? Do you know this person?' They left not understanding what had just happened.

"So they ask themselves, 'Am I being watched? Has someone said something bad about me?' "

Sofa says many of the young people he spoke with didn't get clear answers from CSIS about why they were being singled out.

"People were afraid and they thought that they were being accused or they had done something wrong, when in fact it was a routine check or sometimes even for recruitment purposes," says Sofa, adding that they were among the most influential and respected members of the local Somali community.

CSIS spokesperson Isabelle Scott said Monday that the agency works with various communities through outreach programs.

"We receive useful information from all segments of Canadian society and we are grateful for this assistance," Scott said. "Individuals are targeted because they engage in specific threat-related activities, not because they come from a particular ethnic group or community."

On Monday it was revealed that, in the days leading up to the Obama inauguration, American terrorism experts reacted to a tip that Somali extremists were poised to launch an attack on Washington after crossing the border from Canada.

The RCMP says it now believes the tip was a "hoax," likely sparked by clan rivalries in Somalia.

The threat resulted in high-level White House meetings to plan reactions to any possible assassination attempt.

Several young Somali-Canadians from Ottawa attempting to attend the inauguration of the first African-American president reported being fingerprinted and photographed before entering the United States. Others were simply turned back.

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