# Transcript

Speaker 1

Because at what point are people no longer refugees? Are are my parents still refugees 35 years later? So we very much want to want to work with people very holistically and not just focus on this, this sad moment of when you do become displaced.

Speaker 2

Welcome to the Global Minnesota podcast connecting and forming and engaging Minnesota with the world. Our mission is to advance international understanding and engagement in every corner of the state. We do this with a variety of programs, including our public events, K12 education programs, great decisions, discussion groups and professional exchanges. To learn more, visit our website globalminnesota.org. I'm Nicholas hand marketing and communications manager for global Minnesota. And today we are continuing our new podcast series by interviewing some of the amazing people that bring Minnesota to the world and the world to Minnesota. On today's episode, we're offering you a sneak peek into an upcoming event for Global Minnesota. On February 28th, we will host a virtual webinar in partnership with the Minnesota based Relief Agency Elite. A light works to build a meaningful life for and with people displaced throughout the world wherever the need arises. The event will feature zaynap. Indeed, who currently works for our light as the communications specialist for the Horn of Africa, she is one of the lights on the ground. Partners working to coordinate relief efforts and will be discussing the current humanitarian situation in Somalia and the right to work to bring supplies, support and dignity to displaced persons throughout the Horn of Africa. To sign up for the event, visit global minnesota.org I've the honor of being joined today by Zainab herself, who will share more about her own background and the work elite is doing in the region. Susanna, thank you so much for joining me today and for all the incredible work you're doing.

Speaker 1

Thank you so much for having me.

Speaker 2

So first, I'm sure our listeners would be interested to hear more about you. So would you share with us kind of your background and how you came into this role with the light?

Speaker 1

Well, first and foremost, I am the child of Somali refugees and I think that's what drew me to working with an organization that supports displaced people, my family and so many other families that experience displacement rely heavily on the kindness of strangers and the support from humanitarian organizations like. Right. So it's really important for me to to give back to the the humanitarian space that really did serve my family. We meet so many people who are going through some of the worst moments of their lives, so to be able to meet them with compassion is really important to me. I also grew. Up seeing very negative representations of this side of the world and of people in need, and I think we all remember those commercials with sad music and children covered in flies. So we really want to break away from that genre of humanitarianism, and I really want my work to be about telling dignified stories of the people we work W.

Speaker 2

So I really like how you pointed out that you know the way that we used to talk about at least in the West, we used to talk about development aid. As you know, these starving children and trying to to move into this new space that I know a light is working on and that was part of a lights rebranding from American Refugee Committee was to take the label refugee. Off of that, and to really place it that you know, these are our people who deserve to be where they are and to be who they are and that we don't need to, we want to uplift and as the name says alight these individuals.

Speaker 1

Yeah, that's exactly right. And and like you rightly said then, going from the name American Refugee Committee to a light was very much about removing that refugee name because at what point are people no longer refugees? Are are my parents still refugees 35 years later? So we very much want to. Want to work with people very holistically and not just focus on this, this sad moment of when you do become this place?

Speaker 2

So can you briefly summarize then the humanitarian situation in Somalia right now?

Speaker 1

Yeah, of course. Well, to start, Somalia has been in a civil war that started in 1991 and just never really ended. So the people had to deal with or continue to deal with threats of violence and also a lack of basic needs to survive in so many places. More recently, we're in the middle of the 4th consecutive failed rainy season, which means that the crops have completely failed. People have lost their lives. Stock and food prices have skyrocketed. And actually the situation. Has worsened due to the crisis in Ukraine because of so many relies on so many grains that are imported from the Ukraine. So as of right now, Somalia is currently on the brink of famine. It hasn't been declared of famine yet, but that's very much what we're seeing on the ground. There are about 8 million people who are being affected by this drought, and it's estimated that 7 million people are at a crisis level of food insecurity and unfortunately it's projected that. 2,000,000 children will face malnutrition by mid this year. And so money has already had one of the highest numbers of internally displaced people in the world at around 2.9 million. And this crisis has made that number go up to 4,000,000. So we're really we're dealing with a really big problem right now and the situation is really difficult. And our goal is to get more people talking about what's going on.

Speaker 2

Yeah, and I think unfortunately for so many people, especially in the United States, their their view of Somalia or what they know of Somalia is essentially limited to the movie Black Hawk Down, which of course is not indicative of, you know, even the city of Mogadishu, let alone the entire country, necessarily. These incidents that we've seen these past few years. Really had all of these cascading effects, you know, I'm. Sure that the pandemic picked off a lot of some of the recent issues, especially in famine. And then as you mentioned, with the war in Ukraine which. Much of Africa, not just Somalia but much of Africa, takes a lot of its its grain from Ukraine, which has created that secondary effect as well. So we look at all these these conflicts throughout the world and especially, even though everyone in the West is is consumed with the war in Ukraine right now, it has so many addition. Second additional secondary effects. Besides just what's happening in Ukraine, it affects everywhere. In the world, essentially.

Speaker 1

Yeah, and it it really feels like people just can't get a break because an already difficult situation coupled with a drought failed rains. And then this. This war that's happening across the world impacting you. It it just really it it. Feels like it's just not fair and it's happening in so many different countries. We're talking about Somalia right now. But it really is. A global issue affecting so many different communities.

Speaker 2

So then what are are you and alight doing to help provide relief and support throughout the region?

Speaker 1

Well alight is providing an emergency response right now for drought affected communities. We're distributing food and using trucks to take water. To people who. Who don't have any access to clean water. We're also providing other basic necessities. Light runs a number of health facilities. So we're continuing to provide primary healthcare and nutrition services. We also have these mobile teams, these mobile health teams. So every day they go out and they go to very hard to reach areas to provide healthcare with. People provide healthcare to people who otherwise wouldn't have access to any. A light also invest heavily into water infrastructure and also sanitation and hygiene education so people have access to clean water, but also understand how to prevent waterborne illnesses, which is a serious that right now, particularly in IDP settlements where people are living in close quarters. Elite also provides protection services unfortunate trend that we've observed globally is that gender based violence tends to increase in times of hardship, so we provide services to communities to combat that, to make sure that women and children are kept safe. And then, of course, we do have longer term investments in Somalia and globally in education and also constructing sustainable housing for people who are displaced to allow them to rebuild their lives.

Speaker 2

Yeah, I was going to say it sounds like at least for now, much of the emphasis is on sort of the immediate term effects, you know, providing just the immediate basic necessities in order to survive day-to-day. But, you know, the transition eventually moves into longer term issues of housing and and education. And getting those sort of secondary and tertiary goals established where we can get beyond just surviving from the day-to-day, people can actually begin to build a new life and thrive thereafter.

Speaker 1

Yes, exactly. And it's it's also very much about building resilience. Because unfortunately this side of the world experiences drought almost every year, it's kind of a cycle in Somalia of droughts and then then there will come a rainy season eventually. But oftentimes that even leads to flooding, which is another issue. So our development work is. About building resilience so that when that when that shock ultimately comes, people are prepared for it and the and also the infrastructure is ready for it.

Speaker 2

So what is something that you wish everyone knew about Somalia and it doesn't have to be related necessarily to political instability or to famine, just something that you think I I really wish everyone knew this about Somalia.

Speaker 1

So I've had the the pleasure of working with a lot of different communities. And one thing I would say is that Somalis are a very resilient group of people. They have a very strong sense of community that has allowed them to survive and not only survive, but really thrive despite hardship. If you if you go to Somalia, there's thriving businesses, there's such a strong sense of community despite all that's going on, people really do share resources. And I think that the situation on the ground would be far worse if it wasn't for that.

Speaker 2

Yeah, I think I agree. We really need to, we really want to highlight, like you said, the resiliency and the ability of of people, especially in Somalia to continue on to rebuild, to move forward and to ultimately pick themselves up and keep going because like you said, there's so many hardships year after year and yet so they don't give up.

Speaker 1

It's it's very true and I think as an organization we're we're providing the the inputs, but it really is the people that you know turn it into something and people will rebuild and people will thrive with or without us because the so many people, that's what they do, they they know how to rebuild after. A crisis.

Speaker 2

But hopefully we can at least make it a little bit easier for them to rebuild for them to help uplift themselves.

Speaker 1

Yes, that's definitely true.

Speaker 2

Well, I guess on that note, what can we do from Minnesota to help smallies, you know, either here in the diaspora or at home or abroad?

Speaker 1

So I'm, I'm sure you know that Minnesota is home to the largest, so my diaspora. In the world. So I'm sure every Minnesotan knows it. So my person, whether it's their coworker or their child's classmate or the guy working in the corner shop. So I do encourage folks to talk to each other, ask them how they're doing and if their family has been touched by this crisis. I do know that there's a lot of community LED initiatives in Minnesota to support Somalia, but you can also reach out to organizations like a life that are on the ground. You can learn more and if you have the means, you can donate. Our website has a lot of resources. So I do think you check that out and you can support people in need in so many different ways. Donate your time, your money, your just about anything.

Speaker 2

Yeah, I believe a few of my neighbors are actually from Somalia, or at least they live in in Kenya now which. I recall you are based out of right now.

Speaker 1

So I'm based on Nairobi, Kenya, that also has a huge Somali diaspora and also Kenya also hosts so many Somali refugees. And also Kenya also does have a Somali population that are native to Kenya. And I think that it's really important for folks globally to learn more about what's happening and support in any way they can and also look to Somalis to tell their stories and share what's going on on the ground.

Speaker 2

Perfect. Saying up. Thank you again so much for joining today and for continuing to do such excellent and important work in Somalia.

Speaker 1

Thank you again Nick, for having.

Speaker 2

Me, of course. That's all the time we have today. You can do the full story at our upcoming virtual event on February 28th at noon Central Time. The event is free and you can register at globalminnesota.org slash. Thanks as always to all of the members and supporters of global Minnesota who make programs like this possible. Be sure to check out our website at globalminnesota.org to find information about upcoming events, learn about our international programs, and sign up for our weekly newsletter. Lastly, a big thank you again to alight for partnering with us on this event and for all of their amazing work all over the world. You can find out more about their work and ways to support their mission, including a rapid response team for the recent earthquake in Turkey in Syria at wearealight.org thanks for listening and we'll talk. To you soon.