

Somalia

Somalia is a country in Africa. More than half of its border is coastline. A long time ago, between the 7th and 10th centuries, it was part of an Arab-Persian trade route for 300 years. Somalia was involved in a lot of business and trade. Much later, it was occupied by Britain and Italy, which used of its coast and port to build their own trading and shipping. In 1960, these foreign countries granted independence to the land that they had taken from Somalia, enabling the two to become one independent country: the Republic of Somalia. (Somalia, Facts and Figures. Available on line).

Since the 1980s, Somalia has suffered from civil wars and wars with neighboring countries. Thousands of Somali people had to leave their homes and look for shelter in nearby countries, especially Kenya, where large refugee camps were set up by the United Nations.

Volunteer Opportunities: If you are interested in culture, diversity, and community engagement, or simply want to assist refugees starting their new lives in our community, please contact:

Commonwealth Catholic Charities
820 Campbell Avenue, Roanoke 24016
Telephone: 540-342-7561

Produced by the Roanoke Refugee Mental Health Council.
More at: www.dbhds.virginia.gov/professionals-and-service-providers/oclc/oclc-focus-areas/refugee-mh/roanoke-council

Amal Means Hope

By: Roanoke Refugee Mental Health Council

Before I was born, my parents lived in a very nice house in Mogadishu, a big, beautiful city in Somalia by the ocean. My parents were professionals, highly educated in Somalia and abroad, and both came from well-respected families. When the war started, my parents and some family members left for Kenya. It is there where I was born. My parents named me Amal which means hope, expectation, or aspiration. I grew up in a refugee camp, but this is no ordinary camp – I lived in *Dadaab* – the biggest refugee camp in the world. People live in tents and were given rations of food and water just to survive. My school is outside under the tree in the hot sun, and this is also where we play. Thousands of refugees apply for 3rd country resettlement with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, but only a few are lucky to be approved. My family lived there for 20 years before being we were chosen to move to the United States.

Leaving Kenya and coming to the United States, I had many firsts. I had my first airplane ride. I was in my first cold room – I did not know about air conditioning before. It was my first time to be with many kinds of people dressed differently. They look different to me but I learned later that I also look different to them. It was my first time to see so much food that was not cooked at home. It was my first time to see trees change colors, then snow, then beautiful flowers, and back to hot days in the summer like in Kenya. It's interesting and different.

Now, I live in a nice house with my parents, brothers and sisters. I have plenty of food (my favorite is French fries!). We have plenty of water. I enjoy my new life in Roanoke, Virginia, but I am also thinking about my friends in the refugee camp and thousands of people who are still there. I lost my grandpas and grandmas in the war and never had a chance to see the place where my parents lived. Maybe someday there is peace, and we will visit Somalia and meet the rest of the family. I can only hope.

Amal is a fictional character. Any resemblance is a coincidence and not intentional.

Can you draw trees and other objects in the empty boxes to improve the living conditions in the refugee camp?

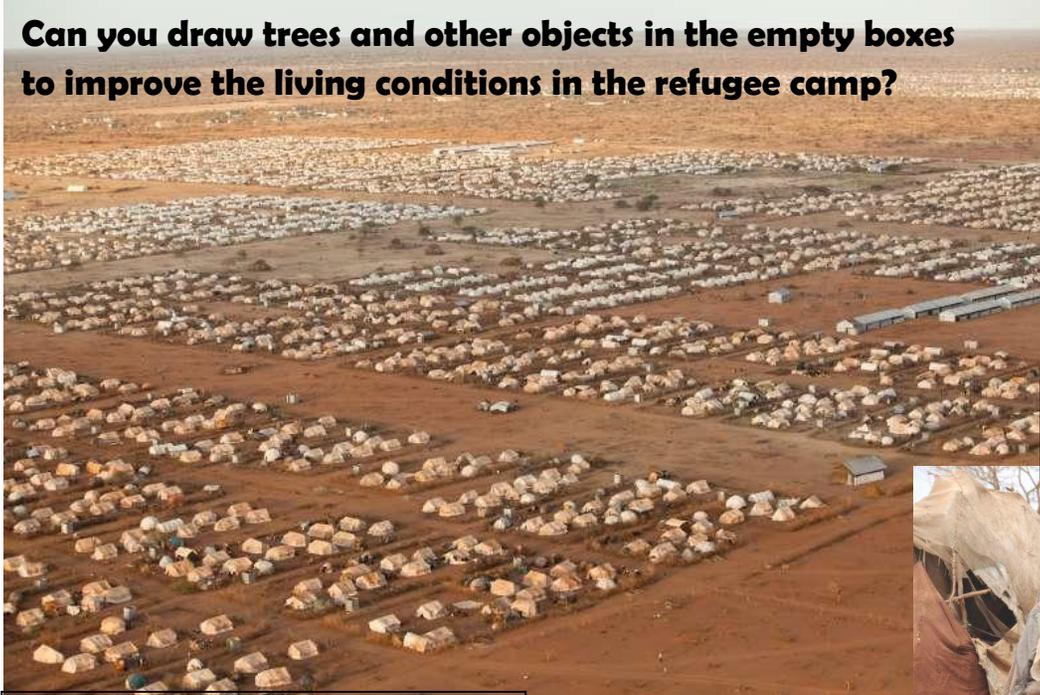


Photo courtesy of United Nations High Commission for Refugees at UNCHR.org



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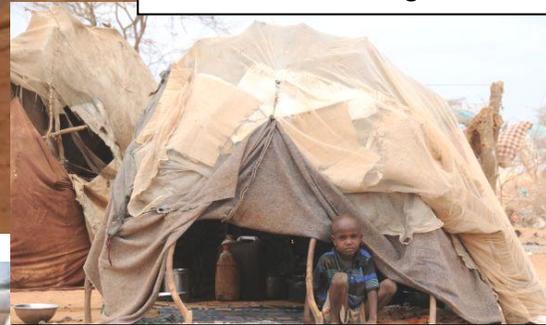


Photo courtesy of Kenya World Food Program, 20 May 2011



Photo courtesy of United Nations High Commission for Refugees @ UNCHR.org

