13) I joined Al Shabaab in order to seek ownership of the gold rock from El Ali

Reporter: In the name of God. We will do our second interview in Guriel with one of the men who recently surrendered, who was not convinced with the ideology of Al Shabaab, who worked with Al Shabaab for a long time. He is with us now and I would like to begin our interview so please follow us. First of all, welcome. Let's start with your name and your code name.

Mohamed: My name is Mohamed Nur Barre, well known as Mohamed Dhicisow and they code name me as Mohamed El Ali.

Reporter: Mohamed El Ali. And Mohamed Dhicisow is your regular nick name.

Mohamed: It is the nickname I was know for.

Reporter: So, when did you join Al Shabaab?

Mohamed: I joined Al Shabaab when the El Ali rock was taken away.

Reporter: Tell us about its story.

Mohamed: It is a big rock on which several cranes were destroyed while they tried to remove it. They took it and said that when they sell it, the locals will get a quarter, and the other three quarters will be for Somalia and Al Shabaab.

Reporter: And what was this rock?

Mohamed: The rock was a rock made of gold. It was confiscated by the government. The last I heard was that it was in Mogadishu for 11 months.

Reporter: Continue the story.

Mohamed: So that is what led me to this. And there were other rocks that were taken away and when it was impossible to carry them, they were buried in order to hide them.

Reporter: And it was Al Shabaab that took the rocks?

Mohamed: It was Al Shabaab. They sold it at Buq Aqable. So, I thought since if I went there, I would not get anything, would it be wise to pretend to be Al Shabaab in the area controlled by Al Shabaab. And as a disabled man with no good legs and as someone who has seizure disorder, they would not need me as a soldier. So for six months, we were at a military camp. You stated one year but I did not work for them for one year. I worked for only two months, and the third month, I scaped from them with their money. They kept me at a place called Mergis in Aden Yabal. It is a recruitment center. We stayed there for six months. Other men were given preference over me and when I asked how the process works, I was told to wait for my luck. Some men escaped but for me, when I weighed it, there was no way to escape and with no gun to help one escape, it was difficult.

Journalist: So, that was Adan Yabal.

Mohamed: Yes, it was Adan Yabal. So, initially, I left El Ali and I was taken from Buq Aqable. At the end of six months, I was taken to place called Adale (coastal town in Middle Shabelle region that was known as Itala by the Italian administration.) I was then taken to a place called El Bur. All the while, I was looking for a way to get out of this place.When I asked for leave, because people were given permission to leave, no one would listen to me. I had conflicting thoughts about escaping which may be equivalent to death. I then decided to wait for my mobile phone. We were only given our mobile phone on the first day of the month when the salary comes in. You would receive it in the morning and it would be taken back at noon. When the mobile phone was given to me in the morning, I said its battery was not charged. They said I will go with a group to the village where we could charge it. The place has three restaurants which would not stop us. I charged it from there. Before I charged it, someone came and said I need to leave because other men were coming to the village. I said my phone was not charged. He said it will be charged with a battery. The battery did not have anything. So, I went back to the restaurant and that is where it was charged. The sky was a little cloudy and we were using solar, so it was not charging well. I was concerned about traveling with the mobile phone. When it was charged, it became sunset and I left. I suspected that there would be heightened security in the area. The other side (coast) was their area where they transport people. So, I came this side. I was eating with people along the way. Tea or any food that was ready. I had an episode of the seizure. While I lay by the roadside, and I had my gun and four magazines. Some men came and took my gun away. One of them held a knife on me. The second one grabbed the gun while another one took the magazine pouch. When that happened, I decided to save my life. They said they wanted to search me and I told them to search. They took me in circles for a while in order to cover their tracks and they brought me to a watering well that was not very far. They told me to drink water and I did. They took me to an acacia tree and told me to sit down. They said “if you escaped this gun from Al Shabaab,” – but I do not remember what I told them earlier because of the seizure – “if you escaped, and the Al Shabaab is on that side and government forces are on this side, what would you like to do for you.?” I told them to call for me government officials in Balad Weyne, but I did not have their numbers, and they will contact each other. They said they were not from Balad Weyne and they did not know anyone there. They asked if I had any contacts and I said no. So, they told me to stay put so that they would get me some tea and information. They left. That was around noon prayer and they were not back by Asr prayer, and I cound imagine civilians who got a hold of a gun would not return, I left. I had water at the well and walked for sometime. I could not continue so I sat down. At around sunset, in a place that is not far away from the road, there was a single house with goats. I went there and asked who was there. There were kids and I asked for water. They gave me water and I asked where were the adults. They were not there they said. I just laid down there and while laying down, a man came. He asked why I was laying down there. I told him that I was a sick man. He was very aggressive. The kids gave me water but not him. He made a call and told someone to come. I head him speaking on the phone but I do not know what was being said. He told me that there were men on the way and I should leave before they came. I will make you two cups of tea and you leave. I said ok give me tea. I don’t know if he put it on fire or not, in less than 5 minutes, he brought me two cups of hot tea with milk. I finished it and he told me to leave. I left and walked for a while. I came to another family with goats. I asked who was there but there was no reaction. I felt that they were suspicious. I left. I slept somewhere between there

and the well where I was captured. A mixed group of soldiers and civilians came to me. They asked me where I was going. I told them about my situation. I did not hide anything. They asked where I was going. I said I was from Hiiraan and I intend to get to Hiiraan by all means. They said this area – pointing to west and south – is full of Al Shabaab, so we will call you soldiers. I said ok. They called the soldiers. They came to me and took me with them. That is my situation. Peace be upon you.

Reporter: You gave us good information. For the three months that you were in their camp, did you take part in any operations? Any battles?

Mohamed: No. For one month, I was told to buy medicines from El Bur. The man who sent me the medicine that I got now gave me those medicines which were taken with the gun. I was there until 20 days before. I spent this time thinking of a way to escape.

Journalist: For the six months that you were in Hiiraan and the three months here, which leaders of Al Shabaab did you meet?

Mohamed: The recruitment center is a place that everyone is put together before selection. There was one man whose name was Taliban. I do not know his other names.

Reporter: How about the living arrangements? You are a man who lived there for a long time. Can you give us a picture of your memories there.

Mohamed: The place is tough. It is very busy. It is a place where when the pay, which is $30 to $70, comes into the phone, you are told to empty it as if the phone was theirs.

Journalist: 30 or 70?

Mohamed: They are $30 for single and $70 for married. When the money comes in the morning – or I don't know if it came in the previous night, they give you in the morning and they want it back by noon. So, there is no use of a mobile phone or telephone communication with other people. About radios, other than memories, I only saw about two people listening to it. I saw young people listening to memories (recordings). So, you are disconnected from everything. There is no way to communicate and there is no where to go. So, I managed that day to get my monile in my hands so I can use it to say where I was. That is how I left.

Journalist: Ok, that is that. Now about the issue of the rock. You said no one influenced you. It was your decision to find the gold rock and other rocks that you thought were buried, your decision was to wear the Al Shabaab shirt to take part in these.

Mohamed: Yes. Yes.

Journalist: What did you achieve?

Mohamed: I achieved nothing. I cannot even go back to where I was.

Journalist: When you joined Al Shabaab, did you have a wife and children?

Mohamed: I did not have a wife but I had children. I had one living child and I lost three kids.

Reporter: You have been around for a while as a man. What is your final call to youth of Al Shabaab?

Mohamed: To the youth of Al Shabaab, I would tell them not to kill themselves in the tough place. There are those who will not listen but others who may listen. I am telling those who want to listen, think of your religion. Think of praying with your shoes on. Your mother and father's wedding was officiated by a Sheikh. Ask him if he is around about praying on top of goat manure. There were things I did not agree with and if I said anyting, I would receive harsher attention.

Reporter: Tell us about addictions. Do you have any addictions?

Mohamed: I had an addiction a while ago but I do not have any now. I used to use Khat.