



# Vale Hassan Omar (1958–2009)

By Aden Omar, (eldest son), the Horn of Africa Relief and Development Agency (HARDA)'s President, John Cornwall and Edmund Rice Centre Director, Phil Glendenning.

Hassan Omar arrived in Australia in August 1983 on a scholarship from his motherland Somalia. As soon as he arrived up until his untimely death on 11 March this year, he worked tirelessly to help others, building bridges between Australians and his fellow Africans from the Horn. As President of HARDA, and in every action and deed, Hassan lived the life of a true humanitarian.

His commitment to his "brothers and sisters" in Africa and Australia was legendary. He was never daunted by "people in high places" and would always pursue his agenda at every opportunity. Phil Glendenning, the director of the Edmund Rice Centre, has many Hassan stories, over their twenty year friendship.

HARDA's President John Cornwall said: "One of my favourite stories concerns a public meeting that they attended together, which was addressed by Kim Beazley, then the Leader of the Opposition and Australia's alternative Prime Minister." "When the meeting was over Phil saw that Hassan had cornered Kim at the door on his way out for an unscheduled 'consultation' and was pressing home the details of one of his latest proposals. The usual response in these encounters is 'write to me with the details', then walk briskly to the waiting car protected by minders. But Hassan had winning ways; Kim had his note pad out personally writing down the details," John laughs.

"And while regularly counselling me not to overcommit my volunteer time, he was remarkably generous with his own," John said. "He worked long hours at this job with NSW Health, arrived home late



but never failed to open his emails and always worked on a one-day turnaround. When I switched on my computer in the morning I often saw a response from him that had been sent around eleven o'clock. He literally gave his life to the cause."

Together with this commitment to 'the cause', was a dedication to lifelong learning and growth, not just for himself but for the countless others that he pushed to achieve. In 1985 Hassan received his Postgraduate Diploma in Eco-System Management from the University of New England. He continued his studies and gained a Certificate in Interpreting Preparatory Paraprofessional Level, a Certificate in Community Welfare Work and a Diploma in Community Welfare Work in rapid succession. These qualifications were in addition to the Diploma in Animal Science and Range Management and the Certificate in Wildlife Management earned by Hassan back in Africa.

Hassan was employed by the Northern Sydney/Central Coast Area Health Service from 1986 to 2009. He had worked at Gosford hospital for 20 years as Revenue Officer before taking up jobs at the Royal North Shore Hospital in 2006 as Workforce Co-ordinator, Immigration Registration and Accreditation Officer in addition to other roles.

Hassan married Kathleen Moloney on the 7 December 1985 moving to the Central Coast where they lived until his death. He commuted tirelessly to Sydney to undertake his duties in assisting African communities.

In 1993 he established the Horn of Africa Settlement Group which helped settle more than twenty families from the Horn of Africa. Hassan also started the Somali Community Association and Ogaden Relief Association, which helps the troubled people from the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. He was founder of the Voiceless Children's Network, and an active executive member of the African Communities Council. Most recently, Hassan founded HARDA, where he carried out the role of President from 2003-2008 and was the Director of Overseas Aid from 2008-2009.

Finally, Hassan took it upon himself to assist anyone in need and did this with sincerity and compassion. He always said that he belonged to the 'greater global family' and would not refuse anyone in need of help. He will be greatly missed by his loved ones and the greater global family.

He is survived by four children whom he adored: Deeqo, Aden, Jamaal and Salah.

His life of giving can be summed up by the following words so often at his memorial service, which echoed sentiments that had been said many times before:

"Now that he's dead – who are we going to turn to? He's the one that we always turned to from a little problem to a big problem. He would take our problems to Ministers at any level. Whatever happened we knew we could talk to him, at any time, whatever we faced." ■



## SUBSCRIPTIONS

A publication of the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS).

Refugee Transitions exists to report on a wide range of refugee and human rights issues of relevance to the work of STARTTS. It aims to:

- focus attention on the impact of organised violence and human rights abuses on health
- provide ideas on intervention models to address the health and social needs of refugees
- debate and campaign for changes necessary to assist, empower and strengthen refugee communities in their settlement process
- provide a vehicle for cultural and personal expression.

To receive a one year subscription (Two issues of Refugee Transitions per year) please complete the following form and send it to:

**Refugee Transitions PO Box 203 Fairfield NSW 2165**

Name

Address

State  Postcode

Home telephone

Business telephone

Mobile number

Email

### Method of Payment

I have enclosed a cheque/money order (made payable to Friends of STARTTS) for \$25 (GST inclusive)

Please charge \$25 to my credit card

Bankcard  Mastercard  Visa

Cardholder's Name

Card Number

Expiry date

Cardholder's Signature

Date