

# Jihadists in Syria Draw Children of Muslims

## Somalian-Norwegian Father Searches Frantically for Two Daughters Caught

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Hajj Deeb, grandfather of two young men who left their home in Sweden to wage jihad in Syria, talks to the WSJ in this exclusive interview.

Rahma and Ugbad Sadiq packed their school bags as they did every morning, and left the family home in Kolsås, Norway, where their parents immigrated in 1996 to escape war in their native Somalia.

But by 5 p.m. that day, Oct. 17, the teenage sisters hadn't returned to help prepare dinner. An email was waiting for the parents in their inbox.

"Papa, we're on our way to Syria. It isn't enough to stay in Norway while Muslim people are in huge trouble. We have to deal with them in their daily life to help them," it said.

Their mother fainted, hitting the floor, her husband, Juma Sadiq, recounted.

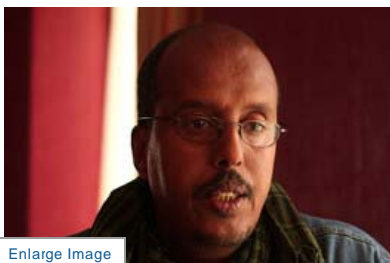
"It was the beginning of the nightmare for our family," he said in an interview last month.

At a time when Syrians are risking their lives to take refuge in countries such as Norway, there is a reverse migration among some Arab families such as the Sadiqs who immigrated to Europe to escape hardships in their homelands.

Hundreds of their children are being drawn to Syria, willing to fight and die despite their parents' dreams of a better life in their adopted homes.

In late October, Mr. Sadiq said he took what little savings he had and flew from Oslo to Antakya in southern Turkey. He frantically searched every hotel, trying to intercept his daughters before they crossed into Syria. He spent \$2,000 buying information from rebels, who gave him unhelpful scraps. But it was too late.

After weeks of agonizing silence, word finally came in early November in a text message



[Enlarge Image](#)

Juma Sadiq has been on a frantic search for his two daughters after they left their adopted home in Norway for Syria's civil war. *Fred Scott/BBC*

from a Syrian number: "Papa, we are in danger. You don't need to come look after us. We will try to solve ourselves. Just go back to Norway and go back to mama and the others."

The family's lawyer said the sisters probably went to Syria to help suffering civilians. However, Norwegian authorities said they were with the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham, one of the most active al Qaeda offshoots fighting on the rebel side in Syria.

European jihadists are flocking to Syria in larger numbers than they have before in other Middle Eastern wars, authorities said. The Norwegian Defense Research Establishment, a branch of the country's armed forces, estimates that more than 1,100 Europeans have joined Islamist militant groups gaining traction in Syria's civil war.

Scandinavian authorities face a difficult task trying to quell this flow. Security services have few other tools other than persuasion because it isn't illegal to join groups linked to al Qaeda or to travel to and fight in conflict zones.



[Enlarge Image](#)

Juma Sadiq's two daughters who left their adopted home in Norway for Syria's civil war. *Fred Scott/BBC*

In Sweden, the al Deeb brothers—18-year-old Motassem and 21-year-old Hassan—were both engaged to be married and finishing their education. Their parents had moved the family to Borås about eight years ago to escape the severe poverty in the Lebanese slum of Mankoubeen, which means "those who've suffered disaster."

Last summer, they told their parents they were going to visit relatives in Lebanon. Instead, they sneaked into Syria. The only

message they left behind was a video announcing their intention to die fighting President Bashar al-Assad's forces, their family said.

The younger brother detonated his suicide vest at a checkpoint manned by the Syrian army in Homs, and his brother died in the ambush that followed this August, according to the family.

In Mankoubeen, where streets overflow with trash and sewage, their grandfather Hajj Deeb proudly showed off a large martyrdom banner for his grandsons. But not everyone in the family was that enthusiastic.

"I just don't understand why," said Jihad al Deeb, a cousin of the brothers. "Everyone from Mankoubeen wants a Swedish passport."

The Sadiq sisters, too, had access to excellent, free education, unthinkable in Somalia where finding food and guarding against militants occupied most of the family's time.

Rahma, 19, was a talented painter and 16-year-old Ugbad was about to start university to study economics, their father said.

"I can't understand why they left," he lamented, recalling that growing up in Somalia, he was a child soldier. "Someone brainwashed my children."

Like the parents of other children who have fled to Syria, Mr. Sadiq blamed the local mosque for radicalizing his daughters. He also blamed the Internet, where impressionable youth have Islamic extremist chat forums and sleek al Qaeda videos at their fingertips.

Ugbad, the younger daughter, posted tragic scenes of Syrian civilians suffering on her YouTube account. Some of her other posts hinted at her struggle to assimilate in Europe. One YouTube post called "The Psychology of Ho-ology," features a hip young British Muslim named Dawah Man who wears a New York Yankees baseball cap and links raunchy Western music videos to premarital sex. Other videos used the word "kafir," or

infidel, frequently when criticizing Western culture and policies.

Mr. Sadiq couldn't be reached for comment after he left Syria. But his lawyer, Geir Lippestad, relayed his account of what happened next.

Frustrated and anxious, the father followed his daughters into Syria's battlefields in November. He found them with a militant group there, the lawyer said. The father said the rebels held him prisoner for two weeks and tortured him, according to the lawyer.

His younger daughter, Ugbad, had been shot in the leg and badly wounded. But the rebels wouldn't allow her and her sister to leave with their father, the lawyer said.

"When he met his kids, they wept in a mixture of joy and despair," said Mr. Lippestad. "The oldest daughter grasped his body and wouldn't let go."

Mr. Sadiq is preparing for another trip to Turkey in the coming days to try once again to take his daughters home.

—Niclas Rolander in Stockholm contributed to this article.

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