



"Creating partnerships for global peace, security and development"

Somalis reach out to Jewish community

A first-generation Somali Canadian immigrant, Toronto law student Ayan Hersi didn't know whom to turn to for advice and help pursuing her career.

But an innovative program, announced yesterday, is expected to give the 27-year-old woman and youth from her 250,000-strong community – one of Greater Toronto's and Canada's most impoverished – a needed lift by matching them with mentors from the more established Jewish community.

"Our generation is still young and the future is in our hands. Unlike others, we can't call so and so and ask for help," said Hersi, who has an undergraduate degree in equity studies, political science and African studies, and is pursuing a law degree at University of Toronto.

"We always have to go outside the community for help," she added. "I am the first in my family to have graduated from a university, and studying law."

The unusual partnership between the Canadian Somali Congress, the United Jewish Appeal of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Jewish Congress is the brainchild of the Canadian International Peace Project, a non-partisan charitable organization that helps bring together diverse groups to work on peace, security and development projects.

Hersi is paired with James Morton, past president of the Ontario Bar Association, whose Jewish immigrant family arrived in Canada in the 1960s from Europe via the U.S.

Mark Persaud, peace project founder, said the Somali community has identified the lack of mentorship opportunity as a huge disadvantage for its young people. He hopes the program can be a model for future initiatives.

Source: Nicholas Keung, Immigration/Diversity reporter, Toronto Star, published October 29, 2008