

Hassan Bakar, the man who was offered a job at a government ministry

(ERGO) – Hassan Bakar Bile, 25, an albino living in a displacement camp in the southern Somali town of Kismayo, was having a tough time until being offered a job at a government ministry.

Hassan, who was working at a local car wash, was recently hired as a gardener in the Jubbaland finance ministry compound, at a salary of \$200 per month.

“It is a great job. I only work when the weather is mild because they know I can’t handle very hot weather,” Hassan enthused.

“Life was very difficult before, but it is now excellent for me and my family. I’m able to save \$100 a month after spending \$50 on food for the family and another \$50 on the children.”

The offer came after local media reported his struggles at an outdoor car wash, working in unbearable heat to earn a couple of dollars and often facing abuse from drivers about the way he looked.

“Some days I’d stay there until dusk without getting any work, while the kids were waiting for me, thinking their dad is out working. I’d go home empty-handed and my whole body would be aching from sun exposure. I sometimes would get so sick that I had to stay at home for five days,” he said.

Mohamed Kamil Yusuf, director general at the finance ministry, told Radio Ergo that the government is aware of the challenges faced by the 20 or so albinos in the city.

“Normally people have to go through a competitive process to get a job with the government, but we made an exception for Hassan. Considering his situation, we asked him what skills he had and gave him a job based on one of the skills he cited. We made special arrangements based on his needs like arranging so that he does not have to work when the weather is too hot for him,” he said.

Hassan, the first albino in Kismayo to work for the government, is a father of three children, two girls and a boy, none of whom has albinism. He also takes care of his 14-year-old brother, who has albinism.

Hassan's family live in three makeshift huts in Habibo-Tano IDP camp. He hopes to relocate the family to better housing where the children can attend school.

Those with albinism – a rare genetic disorder – are stigmatised and shunned in Somalia, finding it difficult to obtain education and work because of the social exclusion.

Halima Hassan Ali, another albino, lives with her family of six in Sanguni IDP camp in Kismayo. The family was depending on her husband's 50,000 Somali shillings daily earnings as a porter, until he suffered an injury at work.

She was unable to find domestic work in houses near the camp, like most IDP women, because of the discrimination she faced.

"When they see me, they start looking at each other. I hear their murmurs and their hurtful words reach my ears. I wonder why they cannot accept me as I am, God made me this way and I've no issue with it," she told Radio Ergo.

Her neighbours have been assisting them with food since her husband has been unable to work.

Halima urged support to be given to albinos to find work without discrimination and under favourable conditions so that they can make something of their lives.

