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 Photographs by
 Josh Robenstone



Zahra Mustaf is sitting tapping on a computer in a café in the leafy Melbourne suburb of Ivanhoe. She is wearing a veil over her hair but her forearms are uncovered. She looks like a fashionable Australian Muslim. As we talk, she says she has some upsetting news from Mogadishu, where she has been living for the past year and where her two children are. The al-Qaeda-linked terrorist group al-Shabab had just let off another bomb, this one in the Hotel Maka, popular with government officials. It killed three people. Mustaf says she spoke by Skype to a friend who had a narrow escape. “She was going to meet someone there. She said she was on her way when the bomb went off and she came back. I guess they attacked the hotel because they were looking for certain people. It was very sad.”

Yet a few days after we speak, Mustaf flies back to Mogadishu where she is running a thriving architecture practice called Yaglel Design+Build. She hopes to take advantage of the improving political situation in Somalia. She is one of a small but growing trickle of business people among the 2 million-strong Somali diaspora who are returning to rebuild their country. Despite the bombings and other terrorist activity, Somalia has its best chance of stability in two decades.

Anyone who has seen the film *Black Hawk Down* about dead US marines being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, or *Captain Phillips*, the Tom Hanks film about Somali pirates, or followed the al-Shabab attacks in September in the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, will think Mustaf is crazy for giving up a job as an architect with a respectable suburban Melbourne firm and heading to Somalia instead. Indeed, there are plenty of fellow Somali who think she is crazy for going back. A recent book on the country by James Fergusson was titled *The World's Most Dangerous Place: Inside the Outlaw State of Somalia*.

But Mustaf sees small signs of improvement around her every day: “One simple thing is that it used to be dark. Now there is a law that every household have a light outside. I remember how happy I was after walking from my mum’s house to the shops by myself at 9pm. A friend called me and told me that he took almost a two-kilometre walk at night. This is people testing the water, saying ‘let us do this’.”

Inspiring stories: Zahra Mustaf takes in the *Designing 007: Fifty Years of Bond Style* exhibition at the Melbourne Museum. She likes Halle Berry’s portrayal of a strong, black woman.

