

## Samuel Getachew

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[01:00:04:04] My name is Samuel Getachew. My background is Ethiopian. I've been in Canada since 1990.

### **Life before Canada**

[01:00:17:11] In 1987, my dad found a position within the United Nations to work in a refugee camp in Zambia. Mozambique was going through war and all kinds of problems. And most Mozambiquans were coming to Zambia to find refuge and my dad was put in charge of that refugee camp.

[01:00:41:23] My dad was working to ensure that refugees were being given the most basic human rights: the protection of their own basic humans rights, including shelter and food. When we visited my dad at those refugee camps, there were so many Canadians, young Canadians willing to help.

[01:01:09:13] And every Canadian had that maple leaf flag attached to their bags or on their foreheads, everywhere. And everyone kept asking what was that flag all about and everybody kept saying it's a Canadian flag. And everyone wanted to be Canada, they wanted to belong in that Canadian human journey that we were witnessing in such powerful and practical ways.

[01:01:40:13] And even my dad was very, very touched that these Canadians would be willing to travel in the most dangerous places in the hope of changing lives of people they'd never met. And it gave my dad an impression that Canada was a wonderful country. That it was a country we needed to belong to and that dream was even shared by the refugees because they also wanted to belong and become Canadian and move to Canada and become part of the Canadian dream.

### **Canadian values**

[01:02:21:10] Canada and Canadians have basic values that go back generations. The idea of peacekeeping that was started by Mike Pearson, a former Canadian diplomat who won on behalf of Canadians, a Nobel Peace Prize, is a value that I hold very, very dear. And that's a value that most Canadians hold close to their heart: the idea of bringing peace in some of the most dangerous places.

[01:02:49:22] And my home country Ethiopia, was no exception. We benefitted from the Canadian peacekeeping efforts and that is one of the most treasured legacies that was left to us by those that came before us.

[01:03:07:08] You can walk into an African village and find kids named after Stephen Lewis, a Canadian diplomat who gave so much of his time and his energy to make sure

that HIV/AIDS would disappear from the continent that I come from. And you can literally find kids named after him. You can even look at the history of South Africa and be motivated by the contribution of Brian Mulroney who contributed in terms of the end of minority rules in South Africa.

**[01:03:41:22]** So those are the Canadian values that I hold very dear. And Canadians should be reminded of our past as much as the future that's ahead and the future that I would like to be part of.

### **On racism**

**[01:03:56:10]** I remember when I first came to Canada, there was a moment where I was in Ottawa with a friend of mine, and at the shopping mall on Rideau, which is the heart of Ottawa, there was a guy who pushed me and told me to go back to Somalia. That was the only incident I experienced. But at the time, I didn't even care because that was a very, very minor issue for me and I haven't noticed it. It hasn't changed me. It has really motivated me that Canada is a great country.

### **Community Involvement**

**[01:04:30:23]** The idea of empowering young people appeals to me the most, and I work mostly with Ethiopian Canadians to ensure that they have a piece of the Canada that we all want to be part of. I do not want to see new Canadian being ghettoized. I want them to be able to get all the opportunities they need so they can build the foundation they need to be successful Canadians.

**[01:05:00:13]** When I was given the opportunity to be involved with The Historical-Dominion Institute and its signature program, Passages to Canada, the opportunity to be engaged with young people was what attracted me the most.

**[01:05:16:04]** I remember an incident where I had a chance to speak with grade seven students. I remember when this young kid from South Korea stood up and said, on behalf of my South Korean family and my home country, he wanted to say thank you to me for the contribution that was made by my home country during the Korean War.

**[01:05:37:11]** Ethiopia had sent peacekeepers to the Korean War and had made so many contributions. I was shocked; I didn't even know the history. I've heard very drive-by stories when I was young and I had to go home and Google the story and I was very, very touched. It shows you that you can never discount a kid.

**[01:06:02:11]** I mean, it was a conversation that showed me that you can learn about your own history from a very unexpected source. **[01:06:13]**

[End of recorded material]

*Samuel Getachew is an award winning journalist based in Toronto. He was recently awarded a medal for journalism from the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, The Honourable David Onley.*