

## Nyamemiso to the World; Hulda Momanyi's Historic Feat



*Photo courtesy VOA*

On Wednesday, 6th November 2024, there was singing and dancing in a tiny village in Western Kenya like there had never been before. Traditional Kisii songs and ululations shattered the tranquility of Nyamemiso as men and women danced into a simple, elegant bungalow waving small branches. Their smiles were as radiant as the late-morning sunshine as they made their way into the home of Bethsheba Kerubo. Her grand-daughter had been elected into the House of Representatives thousands of miles away and this was an occasion well worthy of a celebration. The recently concluded US elections were historic for a couple of reasons. One of the less controversial and praiseworthy of these was naming the first person of Kenyan origin to the US Congress.

### **From the brink of deportation**

When Hulda Momanyi first set foot in the United States almost 30 years ago, she could never have dreamed of one day becoming a part of its top political leadership. In those early years, the extent of Hulda, her siblings, and her parents' aspirations was simply to obtain permanent residence in the country they had emigrated to. It took 11 long years and the intervention of then-Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone for Philip Momanyi and his family to be able to live and work freely in America. But whoever said that the brightest morning comes after the darkest night must have been onto something. The same Hulda who was on the verge of being deported back then, is now one of the same nation's lawmakers.

Having one of their daughters sitting in Capitol Hill is undoubtedly a proud moment for Kenya and Africa at large. But it's not the first time Africa, or even East Africa, has given the people of Minnesota a representative in Washington D.C. In January 2019, [Ilhan Omar](#) was sworn in as not just the first-ever woman of African origin to represent Minnesotans but also the first woman of color to hold this distinction.

Like Hulda, Ilhan was born in East Africa and moved to America with her family in the 1990s. But while the Momanyis had relocated in search of greener pastures, Ilhan and her folks were fleeing Somalia's decades-long civil war. The Omar family in fact spent four years in Kenya as refugees before finding their way to the Land of 10,000 Lakes. Inspired by her grandfather, young Ilhan soon made her first forays into leadership working as a policy fellow at Humphrey's School of Public Affairs.

### **The woman for the job**

In her short stint in Congress, Ilhan has passionately championed the causes the people elected her to address- education, student support, and affordable healthcare for all. As Hulda begins her term, District 38 residents will hope that she will be just as committed to fixing their issues. But they will find her focused with her feet firmly on the ground. She is keen on broadening affordable housing options and fighting for workers' rights. She also wants to give small business owners (like herself before her election) all the support they need to succeed. Going by her record of community leadership, including her presidency of Kenya's largest community in Minnesota, Hulda will make the changes her people desire.

She also hopes to pave the way for the next generation of black women leaders, including those who came from overseas to chase the American dream. "There's enough space in this Legislature for more people of color, especially immigrants because that's the voice that is missing." As an aspiring politician, former District 65A Representative Rena Moran took Hulda under her wing and believed in her. More importantly, she gave Hulda the vision of a black politician she could aspire to. And Hulda wants to do the same. "I don't want to be the last."