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THE LATE MR. AMIN SHIVJI

Statement by:

The Honourable Mobina S. B. Jaffer

Tuesday, February 26, 2013

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Hon. Mobina S.B. Jaffer: Honourable senators, I rise to pay tribute to my friend Amin Shivji, a talented entrepreneur, tireless community advocate and proud Canadian.

After the expulsion of Ugandan Asians in 1972, Amin arrived in Canada as a refugee with little money and few belongings. He was 26 years old and newly married. He had left behind a comfortable life and a successful sugarcane farm in Uganda. Not one to wallow in his misfortune, Amin bought a home in Richmond, B.C., and enrolled in the MBA program at the University of British Columbia within two years of his arrival. Three years later, in 1977, Amin became a proud Canadian citizen. He would contribute work to the banking sector and later found a start-up venture company.

In the 1990s, he decided to return the skills he learned in Canada to Uganda. Amin reclaimed his cherished sugarcane farm, which was in ruins. Ever the optimist and visionary, he started from scratch and pioneered organic, biodynamic and fair trade farming in Uganda. Today, his business remains the oldest and largest exporter of organic fruit in Uganda.

Throughout his life, Amin dedicated himself to his three great passions: community service, education and his family. He instilled the importance of education in his daughters and funded an annual trophy called the Shivji Cup to recognize outstanding citizenship and academic achievement at Walter Lee Elementary School in Richmond, which his daughters had attended.

A former student of the Aga Khan Schools in Uganda, Amin would later volunteer as chairman of the schools in 1997, modernizing the curriculum, introducing information technologies and ensuring access for all deserving students, regardless of their means.

A loving father, Amin taught his daughters, Farah, Nazma and Aliya, to take special pride in their Canadian citizenship, stressing the importance of hard work and community service. Today, they are each accomplished women who make valuable contributions to their communities.

In his final years, Amin took special delight in playing with his two granddaughters and baby grandson.

Amin always encouraged his wife, Gulzar, to take on challenges and today she is the chairperson of the Aga Khan Schools in Uganda.

Amin's siblings are also committed to community service. His brother, Salim Ahmed, is a prominent Ismaili leader who gives remarkable service to his community.

Amin took his final breath in the same beloved home in Richmond, B.C., that he had purchased as a refugee 38 years before. What I remember about Amin are his beaming smile and bottomless heart, which made every human being whose life he touched feel special and valued.

Amin, we spent a lot of time together when I returned to Uganda. We will all miss you.