

## **Director's Note – May 2016**

'A Man Like You' is a conversation between a British hostage, Patrick North, and his Somali captor Abdi, set in a windowless concrete room in Somalia. Elizabeth, North's wife provides a counter-point to the story, from the Norths' house in Nairobi.

The play was inspired by the events of 21st September 2013, when Somali men from the terrorist group Al Shabaab opened fire on shoppers at the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, killing at least 67. Following the tragic attack the perpetrators were often referred to as 'animals' and 'inhuman', and indeed it was hard to feel they were anything other than that when the CCTV footage of them blowing civilians away in cold blood was released.

The same footage also showed them however washing their feet and praying in the aisles of Nakumatt supermarket where most of the victims died, a powerful reminder that however repulsive it is, those terrorists and hundreds others like them all over the world have a rationale for their actions, and that it is one that the world basically refuses to engage with. We do not really want to look inside the mind of a terrorist and properly understand what motivates him; it may be uncomfortable, painful and worse, we may discover that in some ways we even identify with his truth.

Thus 'A Man Like You' illustrates the world views of two men who come from different circumstances and hold completely different philosophies, which they discuss over the course of North's captivity of 102 days. They debate good and evil, power and control, who is a terrorist and who is not, and what is God, and in so doing they challenge our own deeply-held views. Though Abdi and North rarely agree their basic humanity connects them, and we come to see that they more alike than we, and they, may initially think.

The character of Elizabeth mirrors the tension of the main action and tells the story of those left behind. Family members of hostages have frequently been described as the real victims of kidnapping, but their experience, due to the inevitable focus on the hostage, often goes untold. As she progresses from lethargy through anger and finally into acceptance we understand her journey as the basic story of almost all heroic human experience.

**Silvia Cassini**