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Troutman Pepper Helps Win Asylum for Southern Poverty Law Center Pro Bono Client

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DETROIT – Troutman Pepper recently secured asylum on behalf of a pro bono client fleeing political persecution in Côte d'Ivoire, a country in west Africa. After suffering severe physical harm as a result of his work on election in 2018, the client made the difficult decision to leave his country and seek asylum in the United States.

Following a difficult three-year journey and detention period in a Louisiana prison on arrival, the Southern Poverty Law Center referred him to Troutman Pepper. [Anthony Vale](#), a fellow with [The Pepper Center for Public Service](#), succeeded in getting the client released from detention so he could stay with extended family in Salt Lake City.

In early 2022, Troutman Pepper Associate Armeen Mistry Shroff signed on to the matter and helped to transfer the case from the immigration court in New Orleans to Salt Lake City to begin the asylum process. With the assistance of two Penn Law students, Shroff prepared and filed the client's asylum application.

"It was an honor to help our client win asylum after what he endured in his home country," Shroff said. "It truly takes a village. We could not have obtained this result without the client's supportive family, our Penn Law students, our summer associates, our local counsel, and many others here at Troutman Pepper."

As with many migrants, the client's journey to the United States was not easy. He traveled through several countries in South and Central America and his trip was prolonged due to COVID-19 lockdowns. As a result of the border closures, he waited in Mexico until 2021 before crossing into the United States where he was immediately apprehended and detained.

To address any potential arguments that the client's time in Mexico made him ineligible for asylum in the United States, Vincent Gianino conducted thorough research on the requirements for obtaining permanent residency in Mexico, and the team connected with local counsel in Mexico City to better understand the process.

To bolster the asylum application, the team filed supplemental information including supporting declarations, an expert report from a professor in Africana studies presenting the Ivorian government's recorded actions against its political opponents, and voluminous exhibits to support his claim. Shroff also filed a strong pre-hearing brief to demonstrate the client's eligibility for asylum.

To prepare the supporting declarations, the team needed to connect with the client's family and friends back

home in Côte d'Ivoire. To overcome the language barrier, Shroff enlisted the help of Troutman Pepper's bilingual summer associates, Linnea Kelly and Bella Roman, to conduct the interviews and prepare declarations entirely in French. As the hearing approached, Marine Eninger, a French intern with the firm, assisted with preparing the client for his in-person testimony.

On October 27, Shroff, with support from Leonor Perretta, an experienced immigration lawyer in Salt Lake, represented the client before an immigration judge. After a brief cross examination from opposing counsel for the Department of Homeland Security, the immigration judge granted the application in open court. The client now has the right to claim derivative asylum for his wife and son who remain in Côte d'Ivoire.

"Applying for asylum requires a lot of work to develop evidence to support the claim. Armeen Shroff did a great job getting that evidence," Vale said. "I am grateful to be a part of a firm that places an emphasis on pro bono work and proud to serve as a mentor through The Pepper Center to younger attorneys as they take on these difficult cases."

The Pepper Center for Public Service, among other volunteer efforts, provides free and effective legal representation to help immigrants obtain or protect their legal status. Each year, Troutman Pepper attorneys dedicate thousands of pro bono hours in support of nonprofits, immigrants, military veterans, children, the wrongfully convicted, civil rights and social justice initiatives, and so many other causes. Learn more at troutman.com/pro-bono.

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