



Winter 2017

## Chicago Pro Bono Team Helps Togolese Refugee Gain Asylum in U.S.

A team from Holland & Knight's Chicago office has successfully secured a grant of asylum for a pro bono client from West Africa.

Associates [Bill Farley](#) and [Anthony Fuga](#), with supervision from Partner [Mark Flessner](#) and assistance from Paralegal [Peter Uhlenhake](#) and Paralegal Assistant [Sean Sullivan](#), successfully won a grant of asylum on Jan. 4 for a pro bono client who is a Togolese refugee.

The refugee sought asylum in the U.S. after fleeing his native Togo, where he feared for his life after being illegally detained, beaten and tortured because of his political activity.

The refugee's story began in 2005, when he was arrested and detained at a military prison after participating in political protests. While being held, he was interrogated, beaten, tortured and forced to work in labor fields by the Togolese military. The refugee was eventually released, and he limited his political activity for the next two years.

In 2007, the refugee's political party selected him as a delegate, which included the responsibility of monitoring the polls. During the election, the refugee noticed irregularities in how the votes were being tallied. Specifically, he said the government had stopped tallying votes for the opposition party. The refugee raised the issue, but the government's military removed him from the area. Later, the government attempted to force the refugee to sign a declaration that the vote count was proper, but he refused. The next night, masked men broke into the refugee's home, beat him and threatened his life. The refugee fled first to neighboring Benin, then to the United States after securing a visa. In February 2008, he arrived in Chicago, where his brother lives. Shortly thereafter, the refugee filed for asylum.

Although he timely filed, the immigration court delayed the refugee's asylum merits hearing several times from 2010 to 2016. In mid-2016, the refugee learned that his hearing was delayed yet again until 2019. In response, the Holland & Knight team filed a motion to advance the hearing date, which was granted by the immigration court.

Mr. Farley and Mr. Fuga's team represented the refugee at his Jan. 4 asylum merits hearing. Mr. Farley first-chaired the hearing, presenting the court with the refugee's emotional story through lengthy direct and redirect examinations. Mr. Fuga supported Mr. Farley during the hearing and offered a closing argument.

At the conclusion of the merits hearing, the immigration judge ruled in favor of the refugee and granted him asylum. The attorney for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said the government would not appeal, and the judgment became final.

Mr. Farley and Mr. Fuga will continue working with the refugee to secure his legal resident status and begin the process of reuniting him with his daughter, who still resides in Togo and whom he has not seen in almost a decade.