

Winston Wins Asylum Trial for Cameroonian Persecuted on Account of His Sexual Orientation

JUNE 14, 2016

On June 14, 2016, a team of attorneys from the Los Angeles office obtained asylum for a 24-year-old gay man from Cameroon. The client fled Cameroon after his sexual orientation was discovered by a family member who threatened to “out” him to the community. In Cameroon, homosexuality is illegal and it is common for those known or suspected to be gay to be tortured and even killed by neighbors and others, including the police. The client was also the presumptive heir to his grandfather’s estate, and his paternal family threatened to have him killed in order to prevent a gay man from inheriting the family’s property.

After he escaped Cameroon, the client played amateur soccer in Uruguay and Mexico before learning of asylum and surrendering himself at the United States border. He was held in detention for a month before being released in 2014, and soon thereafter was placed in removal proceedings.

Winston attorneys assisted the client in applying for asylum as a defensive measure to his removal. The Winston team then had just a few months to file an extensive brief detailing the client’s history and the persecution of gay people in Cameroon and prepare the client to testify at the asylum hearing. Associates Diana Hughes Leiden and Caitlin Tran represented the client at the hearing, where the judge and the government questioned him at length regarding his persecution. The judge determined that the central issue was the credibility of the client’s testimony regarding his sexuality. In the face of very personal cross-examination questions, the client was able to provide credible and detailed testimony. Ruling from the bench at the end of the hearing, the immigration judge found the client’s testimony to be credible and that he had established the requisite fear of future persecution if he were forced to return to Cameroon, and the government waived appeal.

In addition to Ms. Leiden and Ms. Tran, the Winston team was made up of Pro Bono Practice Attorney Nareeneh Sohbatian, who also provided interpretation and translation support. Paris Associate Lara Elborn provided translations of declarations from Cameroon submitted to the immigration court to support the client’s asylum claim.

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