



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Minnesota Attorneys and The Advocates Provide Free Legal Representation to 589 Immigrants, Immigrant Detainees, and Asylum Applicants in 2012

Minneapolis, MN (December 28, 2012): Ms. G was first arrested in Cameroon in 1990 for her involvement in political activities. In prison, she was beaten regularly, deprived of food, made to carry her own feces, paraded naked, and raped by police officers. Ms. G was arrested again in 2002 and 2005 and beaten, whipped, and interrogated at gunpoint. When she was released, she fled to the United States.

With the help of The Advocates for Human Rights, Ms. G was granted asylum in September 2012. She was one of 589 asylum seekers, immigration detainees, and immigrants who received free legal services through The Advocates and its volunteer attorneys in Minnesota in 2012. The Advocates' website has additional information on the legal services provided: http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Free_Legal_Services.html.

Deepinder Mayell, director of The Advocates' Refugee and Immigrant Program, says, "Asylum seekers are often victims of violence, sexual assault, and torture, and being held in a prison-like setting can have significant long-term mental health consequences. Persons seeking asylum often wait up to three years to have their cases decided by a judge. Meanwhile, they cannot reunite with their families who they have often left behind when escaping persecution and torture."

Based in Minnesota, The Advocates provides training for attorneys to represent asylum clients *pro bono*. In fall 2012 and spring 2013, The Advocates is conducting a series of trainings, *Asylum Step By Step*. The trainings provide volunteer attorneys with skills to successfully represent asylum seekers, avoid common pitfalls, and learn from experienced attorneys.

Mayell adds, "Although The Advocates' asylum program does far better than the average in helping people obtain asylum, the asylum grant rate in Minnesota's Immigration Court is one of the lowest in the country at seventeen percent, while the national average is sixty-one percent. There's a big need for trained attorneys to be advocates for asylum seekers and help them navigate the court system."

In addition to its asylum program, The Advocates coordinates One Voice Minnesota (OVM), a network of over 150 groups across Minnesota working to help communities see diversity as an important element of positive growth. The network members also advocate for reform of the nation's immigration system. More information on the OVM Network can be found here: <http://www.energyofanation.org/ovm.html>.

Sample of Recent Case Victories by The Advocates and Volunteer Attorneys

-Ms. S is a citizen of Guinea and fled a forced marriage and sexual assault. The original application was submitted over a decade ago and the case was remanded by the BIA for another removal hearing. She was successfully represented by **Shauna Kieffer from the Ford Law Firm** and granted withholding of removal.

-Mr. R is a citizen of Ethiopia and a victim of torture. He was targeted by the government because of his Oromo ethnicity. He was represented by **University of Minnesota law students Claudia Vincze-Turcean, Justin Erickson, Willy Madeira and Lindsey Greising with the assistance of Professor Steve Melli** and was granted asylum after an affirmative interview. **Emily Good** from The Advocates' staff also assisted in the case.

-Mr. L is a former professor and citizen of Ethiopia who was tortured due to his perceived political opinion. He was granted asylum and successfully represented at the affirmative level by **University of Minnesota law students Gordon Knoblach, Jenna Nand, Edmond Ahodome and Kevin Lampone with the assistance of Professor Steve Melli. Emily Good** from The Advocates' staff also assisted in the case.

-Ms. F was an activist and member of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in Cameroon and she was arrested by the government and tortured. She was successfully represented by **Deepinder Mayell** from The Advocates' staff and was granted asylum in September 2012.

-Mr. N is a citizen of the DRC and was tortured by the government because he was a human rights activist and member of the UDEMO political party. He was granted asylum in September 2012 and was represented by **John Mandler and Michelle Weinberg from Faegre Baker Daniels** in an affirmative interview. Paralegals Declan Mumford and Cristine Trooien and The Advocates' intern Maggie Brunk also assisted on the case.

-Mr. T is a Hutu citizen of Rwanda and fled persecution due to his refusal to join the Rwandan Patriotic Front political party. He was successfully represented by **Emily Good** from The Advocates' staff in an affirmative interview and was granted asylum in September 2012.

-Mr. F was a Liberian journalist who was attacked by members of the government due to his imputed political opinion. He was represented by **Kim Hunter from Kim Hunter & Associates** in affirmative proceedings and was granted asylum in October 2012.

-Mr. B was a journalist in Somalia reporting on human rights abuses and was threatened by members of the government. He was successfully represented by **Nicole Frank and Barry Landy from Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi** and was granted asylum in October 2012.

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The Advocates for Human Rights, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Minneapolis, is dedicated to the promotion of internationally-recognized human rights. To learn more visit theadvocatesforhumanrights.org.