



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Minnesota Attorneys Bring Asylum to Human Rights Activists from Around the World

Minneapolis, MN (Aug 7, 2012): “You have changed my life forever.” This was the statement of an Ethiopian man who learned on July 31, 2012 that his application for asylum in the United States had been granted. He had been targeted in Ethiopia by the local and national government for publishing articles on land rights. A few days earlier, a man from Burundi also learned that he had been granted asylum in the United States. He had been a member of the non-violent movement League Iteka and spoken out against the government on the radio, resulting in beatings, starvation, torture, and the killing of his son and sister.

Both activists were represented by volunteer attorneys and law students in Minnesota through The Advocates for Human Rights’ Refugee and Immigrant Program. With the help of hundreds of trained volunteers, the Refugee and Immigrant Program offers free legal services to immigration detainees, immigrants, and asylum seekers in search of protection under the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

While activists continue to bring change to countries in the Middle East and around the world, individuals on the front lines often face great personal danger. Many asylum applicants to the United States have suffered torture, indefinite detention, kidnapping, or other human rights violations as a result of their activism. Relocating to the United States or another country is often a last resort, but it can provide safety and security for activists to continue advocating for human rights in their home countries.

Through the Refugee and Immigrant Program, The Advocates provides training for attorneys in Minnesota to represent asylum clients *pro bono*, or free of charge. This fall, The Advocates will host a two-part training on representing asylum clients in removal proceedings. The trainings, “Removing the Fear from Removal Hearings,” are offered free of charge to attorneys who have taken on or assisted with an asylum case in the past two years, or who commit to taking on a *pro bono* asylum case in the next year.

The Advocates thanks the volunteers who represented the Burundi asylum client (attorneys Mark Lee from Maslon Edelman Borman & Brand, LLP and Matthew Lewis from General Mills) and the Ethiopian client (University of Minnesota Immigration & Human Rights Law Clinic students Gordon Knoblach, Jenna Nand, Edmond Ahadome, and Kevin Lampone, supervised by Stephen Meili).

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The Advocates for Human Rights, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is dedicated to the promotion of internationally-recognized human rights. The Advocates has received international recognition for a broad range of innovative programs and holds Special Consultative Status with the United Nations. To learn more about The Advocates’ local, national, and international work, visit theadvocatesforhumanrights.org.