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Influx of Central American Asylum Seekers

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By: Claire Reichstein

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Influx of Central American Asylum Seekers - Is There Really Peace in Guatemala?

By Claire Reichstein and Elizabeth Marengo

Katherine Zarate of **Thelen Reid & Priest, LLP** was just out of law school when she volunteered as Jose Luis Navarro-Guiermo's pro bono attorney. Jose Luis fled Guatemala after being beaten and abducted by Guatemalan authorities to seek refuge in the U.S. After hours of work to develop trust, Katherine learned that Jose Luis was terrified of presenting himself to U.S. authorities because of his traumatic experiences in Guatemala, "Piece by piece, we figured it out: the symbol of authority was something that really scared our client."

Julie and **John Corcoran** of **Thelen Reid** and **Joye Wiley** of **Ark & Wiley** lent their expertise. Through their hard work, the pro bono team persuaded the Immigration Judge that Jose Luis deserved asylum, based on the persecution he had suffered. Katherine notes that while the case was procedurally difficult, "It was just such a rich story, with its twists and turns. It was just like life."

This year, the following volunteer attorneys and law firms have successfully represented Guatemalan refugees:

- **Jacquelyn Newman** and mentor **Jill Stanton**, both private practitioners
- **Theresa Cabral** of **Morrison & Foerster** with mentors **Karen Musalo** and **Stephen Knight** of the **Center for Gender and Refugee Studies**
- **Caroline Davidson** of **Howard Rice Nemerovski Canady Falk & Rabkin** and mentor **Alice Hall**, a private practitioner
- **Ashley Dunning** of **Steeffel Levitt & Weiss** and mentor **Kelly McCown** of **Tafapolksy Smith Evans & McCown**
- **John Throckmorton** and **Sean SeLegue** of **Rogers Joseph O'Donnell & Phillips** and mentor **Amos Lawrence**, private practitioner.

Special thanks to our Spanish interpreters: **Sergio Almaguer**, **Carlos Vazquez**, **Evy Leiva**, **Lucy Gerace**, **Joaquin Acuna**, **Gustavo Struck**, and **Aida Howell**.

The continuing migration of Guatemalan refugees raises basic questions about the human rights situation in Guatemala. Is there really peace in Guatemala? During Guatemala's 36-year civil war, the army destroyed entire villages of Mayan Indians and "disappeared" over 190,000 Guatemalans. The 1996 Guatemalan Peace Accords ended the civil war, but the legacy of the war continues and many are without hope that the government will ever prosecute war criminals and human rights violators.

We ask our pro bono community to join us in assisting with future asylum cases. Please let us know if you are interested in representing a Guatemalan asylum seeker.

Topics:

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