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Hughes Hubbard Attorneys Participate in UN Africa Week

News & Events

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During the week of Oct. 10, 2016, Bryan Sillaman and Marie-Agnes Nicolas traveled from Paris to New York to participate in sessions surrounding the United Nations Africa Week 2016 on behalf of the firm's pro bono client l'Association Atangana Contra l'Oppression et l'Arbitraire (the Atangana Association Against Oppression and Arbitrary Detention) and its founder, Michel Thierry Atangana.

Atangana, a French citizen born in Cameroon, was arbitrarily detained in Cameroon for more than 17 years. He was released in February 2014 following a decision by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (the Working Group). The firm is assisting AACOA and Atangana in helping to ensure that the Working Group's recommendations are fully and swiftly implemented, and that there is greater attention to the Working Group's activities and the issue of arbitrary detention.

Africa Week 2016 offered an opportunity to highlight the efforts of the Working Group, and the remaining work that needs to be done to combat such detentions. During the week, Sillaman and Nicolas met with high-level representatives within the U.N. Department of Public Information (the U.N.'s press arm) to identify opportunities for the U.N. to work with Atangana. Nicolas was interviewed about Atangana's case by Voice of America, the primary news network for U.S. embassies and diplomats around the world. The team also held a meeting with the first secretary of the permanent representative of France to the U.N. to discuss Atangana's case and to encourage France to assist in the implementation of the Working Group's recommendations.

The highlight of the week was on Oct. 12, when the Atangana team and Sillaman spoke at a high-level event on "A Renewed Global Partnership for Entrenching Good Governance and the Rule of Law in Africa." The speech praised the work of the U.N., the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, President Francois Hollande of France, the U.S. State Department and others who have helped Atangana. It also commended President Paul Biya of Cameroon for releasing Atangana, but noted that work remains to be done to fulfill the Working Group's recommendations. The speech noted the importance of the rule of law in encouraging investment and helping to generate peace and security in Cameroon and elsewhere. This discourse will be kept in the U.N. archives for 25 years.

The presentation generated immediate response. The permanent representative from Cameroon responded publicly by criticizing the speech and the U.N. Working Group process. The speech was covered in three of Cameroon's major newspapers, and has subsequently been picked up in the daily newspaper "Mutations." According to the team's contacts, the president of Cameroon was immediately informed of the discourse and may now be prompted to resolve outstanding issues with Atangana.

The firm began representing AACOA in September and the project is being handled out of the Paris office. Preparing for the visit on such short notice required the substantial efforts and assistance of team members Anne Gaustad, Chloé Gouache and paralegal Jackie Brune and intern Sajeeva Raveendran, all of whom have actively worked on the matter since its inception.

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Bryan J. Sillaman



Marie-Agnès Nicolas

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