



Obtaining Justice for a Judicial Advocate

When Turkish judge “Ali Veli” was finishing graduate studies in the United States to learn more about the American legal system so he could apply it to his work back home, a faction of the Turkish Armed Forces attempted a coup in July 2016. The Turkish government quickly suppressed the uprising, but then started a national crackdown by labeling ordinary citizens viewed as unsupportive of the ruling party as “terrorists” and subjecting them to arrest, imprisonment, and torture. Many judges were among the first targets, and government officials quickly dismissed Ali and his wife, who was a civil servant, from their posts, canceled their passports, and froze their bank accounts.

Since Ali’s wife and three-year-old daughter had already traveled back to Turkey before the failed coup, they went into hiding in their home country. Ali remained in the United States and began a six-year odyssey to obtain asylum.

While pursuing his asylum claim, Ali courageously spoke out about the absence of the rule of law in Turkey, including in presentations before Congress, the American Bar Association, and state bar associations. He kept track of many of his former colleagues still in Turkey, sharing stories of their suffering during his talks. This advocacy was a continuation of his long-standing support of human rights and the rule of law. During his years on the bench in Turkey, Ali was active in national and international legal associations devoted to these principles, and he encouraged fellow judges to adopt judicial processes to protect and ensure the independence of the judiciary.

In partnership with the Political Asylum/Immigration Representation Project (“PAIR”), a nonprofit organization that assists asylum seekers and immigrant detainees, Mintz has represented Ali since the beginning of his asylum case. Mintz attorneys Caitie Hill and Susan Cohen — with former Mintz attorney Hana Sahdev and a team of dedicated former Project Analysts that included Sarah Engell, Morgan Sandhu, and Mattie Haag — prepared and filed Ali’s initial application and compiled voluminous exhibits to support his claim. Caitie and Hana then fashioned an iron-clad brief in support of our client’s eligibility for asylum.

In February 2020, the team filed supplemental information in Ali’s case, including a report demonstrating the Turkish government’s actions against its political opponents, information about Ali’s continued efforts in support of an independent judiciary, and evidence of an arrest warrant issued for him. During the years the case was pending, attorney Juan Steevens ensured that Ali’s employment authorization did not lapse. Former Mintz attorneys Mallory Goodwin and Alishba Kassim also provided assistance.

After the declaration was filed, Caitie and attorney Kerime Akoglu spent many hours preparing Ali for his September 2021 asylum interview, which Kerime attended to provide legal and moral support. After several months passed with no word from the government, Kerime and attorneys Drew DeVoogd and Susan Cohen drafted and filed a mandamus complaint in federal court to compel US Citizenship and Immigration Services to issue a ruling.

In October 2022, a few days before his daughter’s tenth birthday, Ali learned that he had been granted asylum. While he has not seen her in six years, he hopes that this grant will facilitate his being reunited with her and his wife.

“The work Ali has done, and continues to do, to fight for the rule of law and an independent judiciary in Turkey is incredibly important. It has been a privilege to help him through our work on his asylum application,” Caitie said.

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