

Alaska Immigration Justice Project



Winter 2011

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AIJP Asylum Victory!

Robert is a prolific writer of plays, poetry and essays from Nigeria. His writings have always focused on the political issues facing the Nigerian people. In November 2011, after waiting 10 years for his immigration documents, he was granted asylum and provided sanctuary in the United States.

After graduating in 1998 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in African History from the University of Ibadan, he worked in northern Nigeria as a high school teacher.

While teaching, a fourteen year old student, who was being forced to marry a seventy-seven year old man, came to him pleading for help. She thought that since he was a Muslim and also a teacher, he would have some

authority to speak to her father. Robert said he would, but it did not work. The marriage occurred with the approval of local authorities.

He was so disgusted about the marriage that he wrote a protest play about it entitled "Bondage". The play was produced with local actors in the heavily Muslim region. Robert was soon attacked and arrested by members of an Islamic group called "Isbah" authorized by the government to enforce Shari'ah law in northern Nigeria.

His apartment was vandalized and belongings confiscated. The Muslim militants held a gun to his head and labeled him an infidel. They accused him of abandoning the faith as a result of his play "Bondage" that tackles the oppression of women and chil-

dren under Shari'ah law. The incidents occurred ten months before his arrival in the United States in 2001.

As a result of his passion for his craft, Robert's life is in danger. The political and religious climate in Nigeria is still very troubled. There has been ongoing violence throughout the country as a result of an Islamic sect loosely modeled on Afghanistan's Taliban movement. The group opposes Western education and wants Shari'ah (Islamic law) law's rigid ideology to be adopted across Nigeria.

Robert continues to write plays in the United States condemning the oppression of women and children and the corruption of the Nigerian political system.

Message from Board Member, Mara Kimmel



This year has been a great one for the Alaska Immigration Justice Project. As we enter our sixth year, our legal and language programs are going strong. The excellent lawyers at AIJP have served over 650 people, and our incredible staff at the Language Interpreter Center has trained 142 interpreters, who have provided interpreter services to more than 1000 medical, legal and social service appointments since January 2011. In addition, we are expanding the reach of our programs to communities in rural Alaska who are in need of our services. But one of the things I'm most proud of is the completion of our book, "Portraits: The Stories of Alaskans and their Immigration to the Great Land." This book was produced in partnership with the University of Alaska and the Alaska Humanities Forum. It tells the stories of five real Alaskan families and the difficulties they faced that led them to call Alaska home. Through art and narrative, they tell their stories in the hopes that through their sharing, we build a better, stronger community. We know that this effort is the beginning of a fruitful and honest dialogue about the amazing contributions immigrant families - our friends, family, and neighbors - make to our state every day. On behalf of the entire Board of Directors, I wish you all a happy and safe holiday season, and share with you our commitment to ensure the human rights and dignity of all Alaskans as we celebrate a new year.

2010 US Census Data for Anchorage and Alaska

	US	Alaska	Anchorage
Foreign born persons (%):	12.4%	6.6%	8.5%
Language other than English at home:	19.6%	15.5%	15.2%

Language Interpreter Center Data for 2011

Number of languages we represent:	41
Total number of trained interpreters:	160
Total businesses, non-profits and government agencies using the LIC:	214
Total domestic violence victims assisted:	152
Total appointments through Nov. 30, 2011:	1117
Most common languages provided for domestic violence cases:	Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, Chinese Mandarin, Hmong, Korean, and Russian

New AmeriCorps VISTA, Nathalie Washington

AIJP's Language Interpreter Center would like to welcome Nathalie as its new AmeriCorps VISTA. Originally from Jeffersonville, Indiana, this is Nathalie's first time to Alaska. She recently graduated from the University of Evansville in Evansville, Indiana with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and International Studies. Her area of concentration for her majors was Asia, specifically the Middle East.

After graduating in May 2011, she chose to join AmeriCorps as a way to gain experience in the nonprofit sector while doing volunteer work. The position with Alaska Immigration Justice Project's Language Interpreter Center stood out to Nathalie due to its unique mission and the services that it offers to immigrants and refugees throughout Anchorage and Alaska.

She is very excited to learn more about what AIJP has to offer and all about Alaska. So far, her favorite part about living in Alaska is being able to walk outside and see the Chugach Mountains.

AIJP thanks Conor Hallisy of ConocoPhillips for his fantastic work on the asylum case!

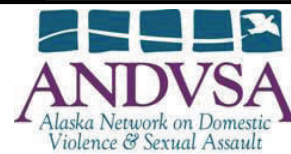


Fall 2011 Interpreter Training

This fall fifteen bilingual individuals participated in the Language Interpreter Center Training. The training consisted of classes about the roles, responsibilities and ethics of interpreting. Interpreters also learned specifically about interpreting in the court system and for health care providers. They also participated in interpreter skill building classes, which included mock appointments. Language Interpreter Center Coordinator, Emily Walker, stated "It was a great success! The LIC trained bilingual Alaskans who speak French, Spanish, German, and two new languages to the Language Interpreter Center - Turkish and Tibetan".



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