

## PREFACE

The world has seen many changes since the fifth edition of *AILA's Asylum Primer*. The world economic crisis has resulted in record unemployment and a steep decline in charitable contributions. Many struggling nonprofit organizations have had to tighten their belts, reduce their staff, or even close their doors. The Rocky Mountain Survivors Center, where I worked for the past five years, could not weather the storm and closed in September 2009. Other torture treatments and legal service organizations have followed suit. These developments do not bode well for the most vulnerable of the immigrant population in the United States, unless measures are taken to fill the gaps in services to asylum-seekers and survivors of persecution and torture.

I firmly believe that there is reason for hope in this season of hope. I see it in the spirit of volunteerism in my own Colorado community as private attorneys step in to fill the gap left by the closure of my organization. I see it in the efforts underway in Congress to reform asylum law and to create a path to earned legalization. I see it in the aspirations of the asylum-seekers I serve who seek freedom and a better life for themselves and their children.

I leave you with the same guidance I gave to you in the last edition. Remember:

- You are the voice for the voiceless. Your representation ensures that refugees are afforded due process. You are a godsend to your client and the U.S. asylum system.
- DHS attorneys have a duty to uphold international refugee law and ensure that justice is done. Sometimes they forget this duty, and when they do, a gentle reminder never hurts.
- The law is a mighty weapon and a shield. Use it fully and wisely. Read and re-read the statutes and regulations, negotiate, object, make arguments no one has ever made before, find the perfect country expert, give openings and closings, file motions, and appeal when you have to.
- Take good care of yourself. Representing asylum-seekers is hard work. Harder than you may have ever dreamed. Exercise, meditate, and commiserate with others. Enjoy your life. If you do, you will be a better advocate.

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