

Afghanistan Refugee Granted Asylum After Years Long Process

News

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Since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 2021, Jenner & Block has had more than a dozen active asylum cases for refugees to bring them to safety. On March 24, 2023, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) granted asylum to client Fawzia. This was one of four asylum cases that the firm handled, in partnership with Tahirih Justice Center, on behalf of young Afghan women forced to flee the country as the Taliban took control and this is the first grant of asylum.

From 2018 to 2020, Fawzia was a student at Asian University for Women (AUW) in Bangladesh. In 2020, she and her fellow Afghan students at AUW were forced to return to Afghanistan because of the COVID outbreak. Fawzia continued her education at AUW by taking online classes from her home in Kabul. In August 2021, as the Taliban were on the verge of taking control of Afghanistan, administrators from AUW made arrangements to evacuate Fawzia and approximately 150 of her Afghan cohort to safety, recognizing that they would likely be targeted for persecution by the Taliban if they remained. After several harrowing attempts to enter the Kabul airport, the AUW contingent were allowed to board one of the last US military transport jets to depart Kabul.

Fawzia's journey to freedom involved stops and stays at US military bases in Saudi Arabia, Spain, and Wisconsin. In December 2021, Fawzia and six of her AUW classmates were offered the opportunity to continue their education at Arizona State University.

In January 2022, Associate Emily Merrifield, Staff Attorney Michael DeMar, and former partner Gay Sigel began working with Fawzia to help her apply for asylum. The team spent many hours interviewing Fawzia, answering her questions about the asylum process, preparing the necessary forms, and drafting a comprehensive letter brief.

In September 2022, Emily and Michael began preparing Fawzia for her asylum interview, enlisting Associate Sophia Cai to play the role of an asylum officer during a mock interview. Emily and Michael accompanied Fawzia to her asylum interview in Phoenix, Arizona and afterwards kept in regular contact regarding her case while USCIS adjudicated her application.

With asylum, Fawzia can remain in the US indefinitely and continue to pursue her education at Arizona State University, where she has been given a full four-year scholarship. It also puts Fawzia

on a path to becoming a permanent legal resident and, eventually, a US citizen.

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