

## Firm's International Dispute Resolution Group Argues First Free Speech Case in African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights

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On March 20 and 21, the [African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) heard the first freedom of expression case in the Court's history. The case involved Lohé Issa Konaté, a journalist from Burkina Faso, who served a 12 month prison sentence, and whose newspaper was closed, for allegedly insulting and defaming a local prosecutor. Mr. Konaté is represented by [Media Legal Defence Initiative \(MLDI\)](#) and Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP.

MLDI and Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr have asked the Court to rule not only that the rights of Konaté have been violated, but that any imprisonment for libel breaches the right to freedom of expression. The case is a landmark freedom of expression case at the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights—a ruling by the Court that imprisonment for defamation violates the right to freedom of expression would mark a significant step forward for the protection of the right to freedom of expression across the continent. The decision, which will be binding, is expected to be made by the middle of the year.

Konaté is represented before the Court by MLDI's Senior Legal Counsel, Nani Jansen, John Jones QC and Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr Partner Steven Finizio. More details, including [live and recorded arguments](#), can be found by visiting the [Court's website](#) and the [MLDI blog](#).

MLDI is a non-governmental organization which helps journalists, bloggers and independent media outlets around the world defend their rights. Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr is a pro bono partner of the organization, with Gary Born, Steven Finizio, Dana Green, Maria Banda, Victoria Narancio and Brendan Casey having provided assistance on particular matters.