
Jamie Gorelick Honored by Tahirih Justice Center for Role in Landmark Asylum Case

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Partner [Jamie Gorelick](#) was honored with a Founders Award at the [Tahirih Justice Center's](#) 20 Year Anniversary Gala in Washington DC on May 11. Tahirih, a national nonprofit organization that provides legal, medical and social support to immigrant women and girls fleeing from gender-based violence and persecution, was formed following a 1996 case that established a national precedent and expanded the definition of a refugee to include victims of gender-based discrimination.

Gorelick, serving as Deputy Attorney General, played a critical role from within the US Department of Justice (DOJ) while the case was being litigated. At age 17, Fauziya Kassindja fled Togo to avoid entering into a forced marriage and subsequent female genital mutilation, a tradition practiced on millions of women in the region. Detained by the Immigration and Naturalization Service upon her arrival in the United States, Kassindja spent more than 17 months in detention centers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. An immigration judge denied her asylum claim, dismissing her story for lacking “rationality” and “internal consistency.”

As media interest in Kassindja's case grew, her legal team—led by then-American University Washington College of Law student Layli Miller-Muro—appealed to the DOJ and members of Congress for her release. The US Board of Immigration Appeals ultimately overturned the immigration judge's decision and granted Kassindja asylum in 1996. The decision was the first recognition by a court of genital mutilation as a form of persecution and a basis for asylum, and set a national precedent that was binding on immigration judges across the country.

Using proceeds from a memoir co-written with Kassindja, *Do They Hear You When You Cry*, Miller-Muro established the Tahirih Justice Center, which has since protected more than 22,000 immigrant women and children and become the country's largest multi-city organization focused on protecting women and girls from human rights abuses. Gorelick, along with Partner [Catherine Carroll](#) and Associates [Claire Bergeron](#) and Sheila Menz, continues to serve as a pro bono lawyer for the center.





From left: Miller-Muro, Grammer, Gorelick and Vieira.