
American Aid Worker Freed in Haiti

FEBRUARY 17, 2010

Aid worker Jim Allen was released from a Haitian prison today, where he had been detained for 20 days in connection with a misunderstanding arising from the transportation of dislocated Haitians as part of a humanitarian mission.

Mr. Allen, a construction worker and small-business owner from Amarillo, Texas, joined a humanitarian trip to help Haitian children and families displaced by that country's horrific earthquake. He learned about the trip from his cousin a mere 48 hours before its departure, jumping at the opportunity to use his skills for the benefit of those in need.

Mr. Allen hoped to apply his construction and welding expertise toward the renovation of a building to serve as a temporary orphanage in the Dominican Republic for Haitian children in need of food, shelter, and medical supplies. Mr. Allen's wife, Lisa Allen, said that when her husband saw the devastation of the quake, he felt compelled to offer assistance in any way possible.

Haitian authorities detained Mr. Allen on January 29, 2010. During his nearly three-week detention in a prison system described by US and international observers as the worst in the hemisphere, Mr. Allen was only able to speak with his wife on two occasions. He was also denied access to independently selected legal counsel for ten days. Fortunately, Mrs. Allen was able to assemble a team of American and Haitian lawyers to represent her husband, including former Haitian Minister of Justice Gary Lissade, Hiram Sasser from Liberty Legal Institute, Amanda Bush of the Jackson Walker law firm and Jeff Ritter, a lawyer in Amarillo, Texas.

After questioning Mr. Allen and hearing testimony from the parents of some of the Haitian children, Judge Bernard Saint-Vil recommended his release. The prosecutor ultimately agreed with the judge's recommendation, and Mr. Allen was released a short while ago.

Upon his release, Mr. Allen thanked the Haitian people for setting him free, and expressed hope that the world would refocus "on the dire conditions that remain in Haiti." He urged others to "find it in your hearts, as I did in mine, to find ways to give to those in need."

WilmerHale represented the Allen family pro bono, with a team co-led by Reginald Brown, Jennifer O'Connor, and Ben Powell. Jamie Gorelick, Robert Kimmitt, David Bowker, Rachel Brand, Dan Kearney, Bart Szewczyk, Stephanie Wood, and Michael Hazel also assisted on the matter.

Separately, WilmerHale has contributed \$25,000.00 to the relief effort in Haiti through the International Red Cross.



(Jim Allen and his wife Lisa)