
France Accepts Boumediene in Action to Expedite Closure of Guantanamo

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After nearly seven-and-a-half years in prison, Lakhdar Boumediene was released today from Guantanamo Bay and welcomed into France after a long flight from Guantanamo. The release of the lead petitioner in the Supreme Court case, *Boumediene v. Bush*—which established the constitutional right for all Guantanamo detainees to challenge the lawfulness of their detentions in federal court—carries symbolic and political import. The move also represents a significant step toward opening Europe to former detainees and to the closure of the Guantanamo Bay Prison that President Obama announced on January 22, 2009.

The move signals increased cooperation between Europe and the Obama Administration. The discussions that made possible Boumediene's release involved not only high-ranking diplomatic officials on both sides, but also President Sarkozy and President Obama.

"We are elated with the release of Mr. Boumediene and extremely grateful to France for agreeing to welcome him and his family. This generous act represents real movement toward relieving the US of the controversy that is Guantanamo," said WilmerHale's Robert Kirsch, a partner on the multi-office team that has provided pro bono representation for Boumediene and five other Bosnian-Algerian men since July 2004.

Finding future residences for Guantanamo detainees is an important issue that must be addressed in order to close the prison. Mr. Boumediene's release and acceptance by France is an undeniable sign of progress on that front.

Mr. Boumediene's release occurred nearly five months after US District Court Judge Richard J. Leon ruled that the government had no legal basis to support its detention of Boumediene, as well as his fellow detainees Mustafa Ait Idir, Hadj Boudella, Mohamed Nechla, and Saber Lahmar. Idir, Boudella and Nechla returned home to Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 2008.

After years of pro bono efforts by scores of WilmerHale attorneys and staff members on behalf of the six men detained in Guantanamo Bay, the firm continues to work to ensure that all six of its clients

are freed.

“Four out of our five clients who were ordered freed last fall are now free. We are thankful for their liberty, which was denied to them for seven years,” noted Stephen Oleskey, a leading partner in WilmerHale’s efforts to defend these six detainees. “But we are continuing to fight for the same result for our two remaining clients at Guantanamo: Saber Lahmar, who was also ordered freed by Judge Leon on November 20, 2008, but remains imprisoned nonetheless, and Belkacem Bensayah, whose denial of habeas we are appealing.”

Critical documents in the case are available at <http://www.wilmerhale.com/boumediene>.