



For Immediate Release

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TRIAL OF FORMER HAITIAN MAYOR FOR CAMPAIGN OF VIOLENCE BEGINS

Boston, Massachusetts, March 13, 2023—Today, the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), Morrison & Foerster LLP, and Dentons US LLP, began presenting evidence in the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts against Jean Morose Viliena, the former mayor of Les Irois, Haiti. The plaintiffs—David Boniface, Juders Ysemé, and Nissandère Martyr—allege that Viliena is responsible for the killing of Boniface’s brother, Ecclesiaste, in July 2007; an attack on a local community-radio station and shooting of Ysemé and Martyr’s father, Nissage, in April 2008; and the mass arson of 36 homes of perceived political opponents in October 2009. “This case is about murder, torture, arson, and abuse of power,” said Morrison & Foerster partner Bonnie Lau in her opening statement. “This trial now is the culmination of Plaintiffs’ decades-long pursuit of justice and at the conclusion of this trial we are going to ask that you finally hold Defendant accountable for his role in these atrocities.”

Lau recounted the Plaintiffs’ allegations for the jury: “Defendant ran as a candidate from the MODEREH political party ... and he was supported by an armed group called KOREGA.” She explained how, “[o]nce Mayor in 2006, Defendant Viliena and his KOREGA associates unleashed a campaign of armed violence the likes of which Les Irois had never before seen. He specifically targeted those he thought were his political opponents, the supporters and members of the Struggling People’s Party, like the Plaintiffs.”

Over the course of the trial, the jury also will hear from the plaintiffs, eyewitnesses, and experts about the campaign of violence alleged in the complaint. At the close of trial, the jury will be asked to determine whether Viliena is liable for extrajudicial killing, torture, and attempted extrajudicial killing, as well as arson.

Plaintiffs filed multiple criminal and civil complaints against Viliena in the courts of Haiti and in regional human rights courts. But at every step, their efforts to seek justice were thwarted by Viliena and his associates. In 2008, Viliena was arrested for his role in the killing of Boniface’s brother, Ecclesiaste, but allegedly following political pressure he was released and fled to the United States. He has since traveled freely between the U.S. and Haiti.

“There is a culture of impunity in Haiti for politically-connected individuals like Viliena,” said Mario Joseph, Managing Attorney at the Bureau des Avocats Internationaux, which has supported plaintiffs’ local accountability efforts. “Plaintiffs have spent the past decade fighting to hold Viliena accountable but unfortunately they were not able to obtain justice in Haiti. Alongside all those fighting impunity in Haiti, I hope that their case in the United States will contribute to advancing justice for violations of human rights in Haiti as well.”



About the Center for Justice and Accountability

The [Center for Justice and Accountability](#) (CJA) is a San Francisco-based international human rights organization dedicated to working with communities impacted by torture, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious human rights abuses to seek truth, justice, and redress using innovative litigation and transitional justice strategies. CJA has successfully brought cases against defendants such as the commander in charge of the Lutheran Church Massacre in Liberia, the military officer responsible for the assassination of Chilean activist and singer Victor Jara, and Syria's Assad regime for its targeted killing of war correspondent Marie Colvin.

About Morrison Foerster

[Morrison Foerster](#) is a leading global law firm that transforms complexity into advantage for its clients. Our clients include some of the largest financial institutions, banks, consulting and accounting firms, and Fortune 100, technology, and life sciences companies. Highlighting the firm's commitment to client service, leadership in market-changing deals and impact litigation, and values-based culture, Morrison Foerster was recognized as one of the top 10 firms on *The American Lawyer's* 2021 and 2022 A-List. The firm also has a long history of commitment to the community and society through providing pro bono legal services, including litigating for civil rights and civil liberties, improving public education and fostering the wellbeing of children, advocating for veterans, promoting international human rights, enforcing the right to asylum, and safeguarding the environment.

About Dentons

[Dentons](#) is designed to be different. As the world's largest law firm with 20,000 professionals in over 200 locations in more than 80 countries, the firm helps clients grow, protect, operate and finance their business. Our polycentric and purpose-driven approach, together with our commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and ESG, ensures we challenge the status quo to stay focused on what matters most to our clients.

About BAI

The [Bureau des Avocats Internationaux \(BAI\)](#) and the [Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti \(IJDH\)](#) are a partnership of Haitian and US human rights advocates. We support the Haitian people in their struggle to achieve universal human rights, access to a just legal system, social justice, a society without violence, and the right to participate fully in choosing their government. Using models like the US civil rights movement, we are active in the courts, both in Haiti and internationally, in the streets and in poor neighborhoods. We work in partnership with grassroots movements, to transform the structural injustices that stand in the way of stability and prosperity for the majority of Haitians.