

## IVORY COAST IMMIGRANT FOUND TO BE TRAFFICKING VICTIM THROUGH PSYCHOLOGICAL FORCE

A recent immigration visa victory demonstrates that an individual doesn't have to be physically coerced to be a victim of trafficking.

Delemani Coulibaly, a native of the Ivory Coast who was brought to the United States by a high ranking official of the International Monetary Fund in September 1997, was awarded a "T visa" by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services on November 18, 2004. The visa allows her to remain in the United States for 3 years, after which she may become a U.S. permanent resident.

Trafficking in persons includes "recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt, bondage or slavery," according to the 2000 Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act. As many as 50,000 people, mostly women and children, are believed to be trafficked into the United States each year.

Because Coulibaly was not physically coerced, initially "everyone said no" to her appeal for help, according to her attorney Morris H. Deutsch, of Osborne & Deutsch in Washington, DC. Many experts thought that without the element of physical abuse or physical force, her situation did not meet the technical definition of "trafficking." But "she was mentally and emotionally blackmailed into working. For five and a half years she worked seven days a week, 15 to 17 hours a day." Deutsch also argued that the employers' treatment of Coulibaly qualified as "coercion" and "involuntary servitude" because they abused the legal immigration process in order to get her to work for them.

Coulibaly told authorities she was paid \$50 per month while working for the IMF official, Bernard Konan and his family, and was usually not allowed to leave the Konan home in suburban Washington, D.C. The Konans, also natives of the Ivory Coast, kept her passport and other documents.

"I felt always completely alone. . . . I led a completely isolated life," Coulibaly said. The family "cut the communication with my parents" in the Ivory Coast and she was allowed only one unsupervised visit with a family member during a visit home with the Konans in 1999.

Coulibaly was so exhausted and overwhelmed by all the work that "frequently my hands would shake. I was very afraid, almost panicked, when Mrs. Konan was there. My hair began to fall out, and I had many migraine headaches. I also had stomach pains that began during the time I worked with the Konans . . . Mrs. Konan continually used psychological force to keep me working for her . . . so hard that I was always completely exhausted both physically and mentally. Until the year 2003, I had neither the energy nor the familiarity with the United States to imagine another possibility except to stay with the Konans."

It was then that she was able to leave, staying with one of the few friends she had made during her time in the United States. She has since filed a lawsuit for back wages against the Konans and is in great danger of reprisal by the Konan family and by government security forces, Deutsch says. Coulibaly says that her family members have been intimidated in the Ivory Coast and “I well believed they would find a way to harm me.”

Ms. Coulibaly and Mr. Deutsch are both available to discuss the case. Contact Mr. Deutsch at 202 728-0820 or [morrisdeutsch@compuserve.com](mailto:morrisdeutsch@compuserve.com) .