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Morgan Lewis
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Morgan Lewis Helps a Mother Attain Asylum and Reunite with Her Children

NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON, D.C: December 9, 2004 –Morgan Lewis today announced a heartwarming victory for a mother who fled her native country to save her own life, only to be detained in U.S. prisons outside of Washington, D.C., and separated from her children for more than seven years. Tomorrow, **Friday, December 10**, Houdou Conte will reunite with her children in New York. Ms. Conte’s story, and the lengths that Morgan Lewis lawyers went to help her, is bittersweet – her warm reunion during the holiday season was preceded by years of legal obstacles.

Living in Fear: When she lived in her native Sierra Leone, Houdou Conte was kidnapped by rebels, held against her will for three months, and raped and beaten daily because of her husband’s military affiliation and her family’s outspokenness against rebel leaders. A mother of two whose husband and father were killed by the rebels, Ms. Conte eventually managed to escape to the United States in October 2000. Ms. Conte was retained for illegal entry into the United States. After explaining her situation to immigration officers that she feared for her life, she was sent to a Federal prison pending resolution of her case, a standard practice. In Ms. Conte’s case, she was detained in three different prisons.

Many asylum seekers, especially if they are detained and unrepresented, spend years getting their cases resolved. A lawyer from the Capital Area Immigrants’ Rights Coalition (CAIR), a D.C.-based organization that helps asylum seekers, discovered Ms. Conte, and reached out to Morgan Lewis lawyers to represent her on a pro-bono basis. “I will never forget how Houdou looked when I first saw her,” says **Madeline F. Ellis**, of counsel in the firm’s Washington, D.C. office. “She was dressed in a blue prison suit and her hair was tied up in tight braids. She broke down when she started to tell her story. She was terrified of being in prison.” Ms. Ellis and another Morgan Lewis lawyer camped inside the Arlington District Director’s office at the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) (now part of the Department of Homeland Security), ultimately convincing officials to release Ms. Conte. Over the next eight months, they helped her obtain political asylum and started the process to bring her children to the U.S. Three years after she obtained asylum, Ms. Conte’s children have finally been granted travel papers to join her through the help of Ms. Ellis and paralegal Eleanor Kennell. The process of bringing Ms. Conte’s children to the United States involved arranging for the children to attend personal interviews at the U.S. consulate in Guinea, as well as genetic testing to prove their relationship to Ms. Conte. Morgan Lewis coordinated all of these arrangements and paid for the genetic tests. Moreover, the firm has made and paid for all of the children’s travel arrangements to the U.S.

For more information on Ms. Conte’s case, please contact Laura Wenner at Morgan Lewis (215) 963.1183. For more information on how to help asylum seekers like Ms. Conte, please contact Deborah Sanders, Executive Director of CAIR, at 202.331.3320.

About Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP

Morgan Lewis is a global law firm with more than 1,200 lawyers in 19 offices located in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, Pittsburgh, Princeton, Chicago, Palo Alto, Dallas, Harrisburg, Irvine, Boston, London, Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt and Tokyo. For more information about Morgan Lewis or its practices, please visit us online at www.morganlewis.com.