

ELAW Fellow: Issiaga Keita, Guinea

ELAW is expanding its work protecting the environment through law in francophone Africa by reaching out to new, promising grassroots advocates in the region. ELAW was pleased to host Issiaga Keita from Conakry, Guinea, for an ELAW capacity building Fellowship.

Issiaga worked one-on-one with ELAW Staff Attorneys and Staff Scientists to advance his work defending communities that suffer from mining industry abuses. He was also a Director's Distinction Scholar in the Intensive English Program at the University of Oregon American English Institute (AEI).

ELAW's work in Africa began more than 25 years ago. We have helped young lawyers in Tanzania, Liberia, and Zimbabwe launch their nations' first environmental law organizations, and collaborated with lawyers in 26 African nations to protect the rights of local communities.

ELAW identifies lawyers working to protect communities and the environment, provides legal, scientific, and organizational support, and connects them with each other. These lawyers are giving voice to communities and civil society, and they become stronger by sharing information and expertise.

Many thanks to The 11th Hour Project and AEI for making Issiaga's Fellowship possible.



Q & A with Issiaga Keita

Why did you pursue public interest law?

This was a personal choice. I would like to be useful to my country and participate in its development. Climate change affects humanity, so environmental issues should be a concern for everyone.

What problems are you addressing?

We face many problems. There is no reclamation at old mining sites and our natural environment is abused and contaminated by ongoing mining and logging operations. And cement factories are polluting the air. Communities are greatly concerned by the destruction of flora and fauna. There is a proliferation of plastic waste. Our government has not passed laws or clear policies to protect the environment. Domestic garbage is not collected, and citizens dump it in canals and throw it in the streets. Burning garbage is causing respiratory and skin problems in our communities. Overall, we lack good laws and law enforcement.

What did you accomplish during your ELAW Fellowship?

Coming to Eugene was an excellent professional opportunity. I met with ELAW staff, shared the work of MDT and made plans for how ELAW will collaborate with us in the year ahead. I met with natural resource economist Ernie Niemi more than once. He helped me understand the real economic value of natural resources and helped me organize arguments for my pleadings. I participated in the ELAW Annual Meeting and the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference, where I met many lawyers and scientists willing to collaborate with us.

Studying English has been a big help, to better communicate with colleagues who do not speak French, to conduct research, and advocate in forums where French is not the official language.

What is your hope for Guinea?

I hope that my new skills will help me better defend communities seeking to protect the environment. I plan to connect with our environmental institutions and make plans for educational events to sensitize the public about the need for action.

Many thanks for this opportunity!

ELAW Fellow Issiaga Keita

January 4 – March 15, 2019

Attorney

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