

Human Rights First

Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

<https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/blog/remembering-juan-osuna>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Work With Asylum Seekers

If you are seeking asylum, we can help

Areas of Focus

Current Initiatives

Juan Osuna, the former director of the Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), passed away suddenly last week. He will be sorely missed. Juan served in a number of critical positions at DOJ, under four administrations. He was deeply committed to due process, the rule of law, and access to counsel.

In the U.S. immigration court system, refugees with asylum claims, children, and other vulnerable immigrants are often forced to navigate proceedings without legal counsel even though the stakes are high and the laws increasingly complex. Over 86 percent of those held in immigration detention facilities are unrepresented. Those who are represented by legal counsel in immigration court proceedings are twice as likely to receive asylum than those who go unrepresented.

Many immigrants wait years for their hearings due to tremendous backlogs that impede access to asylum, as Human Rights First documented in a 2016 [report](#). In a [July 18 presentation](#) at the Center for Migration Studies, Juan explained that these backlogs have grown due to a combination of factors that include imbalances in funding for the immigration courts as compared to increased funding for immigration enforcement, the slow federal hiring process, and the response to the 2014 increase in cases originating from the southern border.

At the Department of Justice and as a leader of EOIR, Juan tackled some of these tremendous challenges. He championed the expansion of [legal orientation programs](#) and supported initiatives that increase access to counsel for children and other vulnerable populations. He understood that U.S. government lawyers and leaders must engage with the legal community and the public. He spoke at bar associations, law schools, and other public events and met with federal judges, government colleagues, and outside advocates.

A few weeks ago I had the privilege of meeting with Juan to catch up and to solicit his perspectives on Human Rights First's plans to issue updated recommendations for addressing some of the challenges facing the immigration court system. Juan also met recently with Shaw Drake, a fellow conducting Human Rights First's immigration court research. As always, Juan was thoughtful, insightful, and generous with his time.

Juan had so much more to give and was looking forward to continuing to advance justice and fairness. He will be profoundly missed by the many people who had the privilege of knowing and working with him. While the challenges ahead are greater than ever, Juan's insights, principles, decency, and extraordinary kindness will continue to inspire all who knew him and strengthen our commitment to justice.

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