

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Koudoukara v. Embassy of Mali

No. 24-1900 (SLS) (D.D.C. June 3, 2026) · No. 24-1900 (SLS) · Decided June 3, 2026

SUMMARY

The District Court for the District of Columbia grants in part and denies in part the plaintiff’s motion for default judgment against the Embassy of Mali. The court finds liability under Title VII and the D.C. Human Rights Act for sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and retaliation, but denies default judgment on the Fair Labor Standards Act claim. The court declines to determine damages on the existing record and directs the plaintiff to submit supplemental damages materials.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Columbia
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Sparkle L. Sooknanan
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Columbia
DECIDED	June 3, 2026
DOCKET	24-1900 (SLS)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff moved for default judgment after the Embassy of Mali failed to respond or appear following service. The court granted default judgment as to liability on the Title VII and DCHRA claims, denied it on the FLSA claim, and deferred determination of damages.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a motion for default judgment against a foreign state, the plaintiff must establish the right to relief by evidence satisfactory to the court under 28 U.S.C. § 1608(e). The court independently evaluates subject-matter jurisdiction, personal jurisdiction, liability, and damages, while accepting uncontroverted evidence supported by affidavits.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published
PARTIES	Fanta Koudoukara v. Embassy of Mali

TOPICS

- default judgment
- sovereign immunity
- employment discrimination
- sexual harassment
- retaliation

PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

civil rights

foreign sovereign immunity

civil procedure

remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the court had subject-matter jurisdiction under the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act over Koudoukara's claims against the Embassy of Mali.
2. Whether the Embassy was properly served under 28 U.S.C. § 1608(a) and therefore subject to personal jurisdiction.
3. Whether Koudoukara established liability by competent evidence for sex discrimination and quid-pro-quo sexual harassment under Title VII and the DCHRA.
4. Whether Koudoukara established liability for retaliation under Title VII and the DCHRA.
5. Whether Koudoukara established a right to relief on her FLSA unpaid-wage claim.
6. Whether the present record established the amount of damages, emotional-distress damages, punitive damages, attorney fees, and costs.

HOLDINGS

1. The court had subject-matter jurisdiction because the action was a nonjury civil action against a foreign state seeking in-personam relief, and the Embassy impliedly waived FSIA immunity through an employment-contract provision referring to United States labor law.
2. The court had personal jurisdiction over the Embassy because an FSIA immunity exception applied and service was accomplished in accordance with 28 U.S.C. § 1608(a).
3. Koudoukara established liability for sex discrimination and quid-pro-quo sexual harassment under Title VII and the DCHRA because the Ambassador repeatedly made unwelcome sexual demands and terminated her after she refused them.
4. Koudoukara established liability for retaliation because she opposed alleged sexual harassment and was terminated as a result.
5. Koudoukara failed to establish a right to relief under the FLSA, so default judgment was denied on the FLSA claim.
6. The court could not determine damages on the present record and deferred the damages determination pending supplemental submissions.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Where a plaintiff seeks default judgment in a case implicating the FSIA, the plaintiff must “establish[] . . . [its] right to relief by evidence satisfactory to the court.”” (3)

“Put simply, “subject matter jurisdiction plus service of process equals personal jurisdiction.”” (7)

“Quid pro quo is “explicit”— it “occurs when an employer alters, or threatens to alter, an employee’s job conditions as a result of the employee’s refusal to submit to sexual demands.”” (9)

“When an employee communicates to her employer a belief that the employer has engaged in a form of employment discrimination, that communication virtually always constitutes the employee’s opposition to the activity.” (11)

“Accordingly, Ms. Koudoukara has failed to show a “right to relief” under the FLSA, and the Court denies default judgment on this claim.” (12)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Fanta Koudoukara worked as a secretary for the Embassy of Mali from September 2022 through July 2023. She alleged that Ambassador Sekou Berthe repeatedly asked her to stay late to have sex, that she refused and reported the conduct to human resources, and that the Embassy terminated her after her refusals and complaints. The Embassy also allegedly failed to pay her wages for one month of employment.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Koudoukara filed suit in June 2024 alleging sex discrimination, sexual harassment, retaliation, and unpaid wages. The Clerk entered default against the Embassy on February 18, 2025. After the court invited the United States to address foreign-relations implications and received a statement of interest, Koudoukara moved for default judgment and submitted supplemental memoranda. The court found jurisdiction and proper service, entered partial default judgment, struck the jury demand, and directed supplemental damages submissions by June 20, 2026.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Roth v. Islamic Republic of Iran, 78 F. Supp. 3d 379, 386 (D.D.C. 2015)
- Mwani v. bin Laden, 417 F.3d 1, 6-7 (D.C. Cir. 2005)
- Jackson v. Beech, 636 F.2d 831, 835 (D.C. Cir. 1980)
- Firebird Global Master Fund II Ltd. v. Republic of Nauru, 915 F. Supp. 2d 124, 126 (D.D.C. 2013)
- Omni Bridgeway Ltd. v. Ministry of Infrastructure & Energy of the Republic of Albania, No. 23-cv-1938, 2025 WL 506570, at *3-*4 (D.D.C. Feb. 14, 2025)
- Elahi v. Islamic Republic of Iran, 124 F. Supp. 2d 97, 100 (D.D.C. 2000)
- Bluth v. Islamic Republic of Iran, 203 F. Supp. 3d 1, 16-17 (D.D.C. 2016)
- Reed v. Islamic Republic of Iran, 845 F. Supp. 2d 204, 212 (D.D.C. 2012)
- Ben-Rafael v. Islamic Republic of Iran, 540 F. Supp. 2d 39, 43 (D.D.C. 2008)
- CC/Devas (Mauritius) Ltd. v. Antrix Corp., 605 U.S. 223, 229-233 (2025)
- Saberi v. Government of Islamic Republic of Iran, 541 F. Supp. 3d 67, 77 (D.D.C. 2021)
- Universal Consolidated Cos. v. Bank of China, 35 F.3d 243, 245 (6th Cir. 1994)
- Rishikof v. Mortada, 70 F. Supp. 3d 8, 16 (D.D.C. 2014)

- *Houston v. Murmansk Shipping Co.*, 667 F.2d 1151, 1154 (4th Cir. 1982)
- *Estate of Majd Kamalmaz v. Syrian Arab Republic*, No. 24-cv-2136, 2026 WL 1159653, at *4 (D.D.C. Feb. 24, 2026)
- *Princz v. Federal Republic of Germany*, 26 F.3d 1166, 1174 (D.C. Cir. 1994)
- *Foremost-McKesson, Inc. v. Islamic Republic of Iran*, 905 F.2d 438, 445 (D.C. Cir. 1990)
- *Khochinsky v. Republic of Poland*, 1 F.4th 1, 8 (D.C. Cir. 2021)
- *TIG Insurance Co. v. Republic of Argentina*, 110 F.4th 221, 236 (D.C. Cir. 2024)
- *Ashraf-Hassan v. Embassy of France in the United States*, 40 F. Supp. 3d 94, 100-101 (D.D.C. 2014), *aff'd*, 610 F. App'x 3 (D.C. Cir. 2015)
- *Ghawanmeh v. Islamic Saudi Academy*, 672 F. Supp. 2d 3, 9-10 (D.D.C. 2009)
- *GSS Group Ltd. v. National Port Authority*, 680 F.3d 805, 811 (D.C. Cir. 2012)
- *Roeder v. Islamic Republic of Iran*, 333 F.3d 228, 234 (D.C. Cir. 2003)
- *Transaero, Inc. v. La Fuerza Aerea Boliviana*, 30 F.3d 148, 149-150 (D.C. Cir. 1994)
- *Republic of Sudan v. Harrison*, 587 U.S. 1, 11 (2019)
- *Jbari v. District of Columbia*, 304 F. Supp. 3d 201, 208 n.9 (D.D.C. 2018)
- *Carpenter v. Federal National Mortgage Association*, 165 F.3d 69, 72 (D.C. Cir. 1999)
- *Gebretsadike v. District of Columbia*, No. 23-cv-03198, 2024 WL 3291744, at *6 (D.D.C. July 3, 2024)
- *Vatel v. Alliance of Auto. Manufacturers*, 627 F.3d 1245, 1246 (D.C. Cir. 2011)
- *Meritor Savings Bank, FSB v. Vinson*, 477 U.S. 57, 63-64 (1986)
- *Holbrook v. Reno*, 196 F.3d 255, 262 (D.C. Cir. 1999)
- *Curry v. District of Columbia*, 195 F.3d 654, 659 (D.C. Cir. 1999)
- *Gary v. WMATA*, No. 90-3076, 1992 WL 714990, at *3 (D.D.C. Dec. 2, 1992)
- *Gregory v. Daly*, 243 F.3d 687, 698 (2d Cir. 2001)
- *Burlington Industries, Inc. v. Ellerth*, 524 U.S. 742, 751-52 (1998)
- *Reid v. Ingerman Smith LLP*, 876 F. Supp. 2d 176, 182 (E.D.N.Y. 2012)
- *McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green*, 411 U.S. 792 (1973)
- *Stanford v. Howard University*, No. 23-cv-3041, 2025 WL 3062907, at *3 (D.D.C. Nov. 3, 2025)
- *Guerra v. Brothers Builders, LLC*, No. 23-cv-1291, 2025 WL 2709631, at *1 (D.D.C. Sept. 23, 2025)
- *Brinkley v. District of Columbia*, No. 21-cv-1537, 2026 WL 850679, at *35 (D.D.C. Mar. 27, 2026)
- *Wang v. WMATA*, 206 F. Supp. 3d 46, 76-77 (D.D.C. 2016)
- *Tennant v. District of Columbia*, No. 19-cv-2949, 2020 WL 4464505, at *7 (D.D.C. Aug. 3, 2020)
- *Dozier-Nix v. District of Columbia*, 851 F. Supp. 2d 163, 168 (D.D.C. 2012)
- *Astudillo v. Salon Macomb, LLC*, No. 24-cv-2294, 2025 WL 1568219, at *3 (D.D.C. June 3, 2025)
- *Walker v. Innovative Concept Solutions International, Inc.*, 6 F. Supp. 3d 52, 54-56 (D.D.C. 2013)
- *Xereas v. Heiss*, 987 F.3d 1124, 1134 (D.C. Cir. 2021)
- *Jean-Baptiste v. District of Columbia*, 931 F. Supp. 2d 1, 15 (D.D.C. 2013)

