Brazilian Man Wins Asylum in U.S.
By Michelle Garcia

From left: Rena Stern, Pereira de Souza, and Brian Ward.

A Brazilian man has been granted asylum by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as violence against LGBT residents of the South American nation escalates.

Augusto Pereira de Souza, 27, lives in Newark, N.J. He said he was worried that he would be in danger if he were forced to return to Brazil. According to Grupo Gay da Bahia, Brazil's top LGBT rights group, in 2008 alone 190 murders of gays and lesbians were reported.

“In Brazil, I lived in constant fear for my life,” Pereira de Souza said in a statement. “I tried to hide that I was gay, but still faced repeated beatings, attacks, and threats on my life because I was gay. At times I was attacked by skinheads and brutally beaten by cops. After the cops attack you and threaten your life for being gay, you learn quickly that there is no one that will protect you. For me, coming to the U.S. was a life-or-death decision.”

Pereira de Souza was referred to the Columbia Law School's Sexuality and Gender Law Clinic by the organization Immigration Equality. Three students — Rena Stern, Brian Ward, and Mark Musico — provided legal assistance under the guidance of professor Suzanne Goldberg.

“In Brazil, police routinely fail to investigate violence committed against GLBT individuals,” Ward said in a statement. “In this environment, skinheads and other groups are free to persecute, torture, and even kill GLBT individuals with impunity.”