

GLOBE MAGAZINE

Asylum denied for guardian of young burn victim from Africa

The decision is a setback for the recent BU graduate whose life has been chronicled in the Globe Magazine.

By **Scott Helman** INACTIVE - 2024, June 20, 2019, 5:17 p.m.



Alex Gitungano embraces Leo Ikoribitangaza at his recent BU graduation. Alex accompanied Leo to the US in 2014 so the boy could receive treatment for severe burns. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF/GLOBE STAFF

Alex Gitungano, the 30-year-old Burundian man who's dedicated his life to helping a young burn victim, learned Thursday that his request for asylum was effectively denied

by US Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Alex — whose life I’ve [chronicled in the Globe Magazine](#) for years — plans to ask the agency to reconsider its decision. If it stands, the denial means Alex must argue his asylum case before an immigration judge. A negative outcome in court could force Alex to leave the country.

Leo, the 9-year-old Burundian boy for whom Alex has served as caretaker and guardian since their arrival in the United States in 2014, got a green card, allowing him to remain in the country. They came to Boston for Leo to get treatment for serious burns he suffered in a fire back home.

Alex filed his asylum application in 2015, when political violence in Burundi started to put his family in jeopardy. His mother fled to neighboring Rwanda. Friends of Alex’s were killed.

The denial of his asylum request is “heartbreaking,” Alex said, but he’s trying to remain optimistic. “God is in control,” he said.

Scott Helman is a member of the Boston Globe staff. E-mail him at scott.helman@globe.com.

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