



EEOC News

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 27, 2010

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EEOC SUES NEW YORK UNIVERSITY FOR NATIONAL ORIGIN & RACIAL HARASSMENT, RETALIATION *Supervisor Regularly Called African Employee “Monkey” and “Gorilla,” Federal Agency Charges*

NEW YORK – New York University, the largest private university in the United States and one of New York City’s ten biggest employers, violated federal law by creating a hostile work environment for an African-born employee that included degrading verbal harassment based on national origin and race, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charged in a lawsuit it filed today.

According to the EEOC’s suit, the supervisor of the mailroom in NYU’s Elmer Holmes Bobst Library regularly subjected his assistant, who is a native of Ghana, to slurs such as “monkey” and “gorilla,” and made comments such as “go back to your cage,” “go back to the jungle,” and “do you want a banana?” The supervisor also frequently mocked the assistant’s accented English, deriding it as “gibberish,” and expressed hostility toward immigrants generally and Africans specifically.

Although the assistant complained repeatedly to NYU management and human resources personnel, NYU took months to investigate and then took virtually no action to curb the supervisor’s conduct. Even after the assistant alerted NYU that the supervisor had retaliated against him for complaining, such as by fabricating grounds for disciplining him, the university did not stop the harassment.

All of this alleged conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual harassment and pregnancy), or national origin, and protects employees who complain about such offenses from retaliation. The EEOC filed the lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York (10-CIV-7399) after first attempting to reach a voluntary settlement out of court.

“Forty-five years after national origin and race discrimination were outlawed by federal law, this case shows that too many employees still face ugly epithets and other hostile treatment because of who they are and where they are from,” said Gillian L. Thomas, a trial attorney in the EEOC’s New York District Office. “It is especially shocking that NYU, a prestigious university that touts its commitment to a diverse student body drawn from around the world, would tolerate such egregious conduct. With this suit, the EEOC is sending the message that no employer is above the law.”

Spencer H. Lewis, Jr., director of the EEOC New York District Office, said, “The EEOC is determined to stop harassment based on workers’ national origin and race. This lawsuit aims to fairly compensate the victim for the harassment he suffered and to implement policies that will effectively prevent such discrimination in the future.”

The EEOC is the federal government agency responsible for enforcing anti-discrimination laws in employment. Further information about the EEOC is available at www.eeoc.gov.

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