

## MVP: White & Case's Hansel Pham

By Parker Quinlan

*Law360 (September 22, 2022, 2:02 PM EDT)* -- White & Case LLP's Hansel Pham worked with a team to overturn the enforcement of a nearly \$18 billion arbitration against the state-owned Saudi Aramco in a fight over allegations of unpaid rent for oil fields, earning him a spot among Law360's 2022 International Arbitration MVPs.

### ***HIS BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT THIS YEAR:***

Pham described his first biggest accomplishment over the past year as helping to overturn a nearly \$18 billion arbitration award against Saudi Aramco before the Fifth Circuit.

In December, an appeals panel refused to enforce the arbitration award against the state-owned oil company for allegedly not paying rent that was owed to members of the Saudi royal family. The awardees, who all descend from a Saudi sheik, claimed that a deal struck back in 1933 bound the oil company to arbitration, which the appeals panel rejected.

Ultimately finding that the company was protected via sovereign immunity, the Fifth Circuit panel also noted that there were a number of issues with the arbitration proceedings as well. Describing the proceedings as "to put it charitably, irregular," the panel noted that two of the arbitrators involved in the process had been arrested on fraud charges relating to the hearings.

### ***HIS PROUDEST MOMENT THIS YEAR:***

Pham's proudest moment this year was when he became the office executive partner for White & Case's Washington, D.C., office.

Pham said the COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented set of questions for firms, including how to reopen safely, and has shifted the responsibilities and thought processes for firm leadership.

In addition to relying on local and federal experts on topics like office reopening, Pham said he also speaks directly with employees at the firm to understand their anxieties about coming back to work.

"The way I approach running the office has resulted in greater transparency and in a way that people



now feel there is a sense of empathy from those at the top," Pham said. "At a minimum, it's important that leadership makes sure associates understand that their voices are being heard."

***HIS ADVICE FOR JUNIOR ASSOCIATES:***

Recalling both his professional career and his personal background, Pham said he wants junior associates to understand and appreciate the control they have over their careers.

"I want them to know you can change your destiny and you can branch out," Pham said. "I was experienced in arbitration, but I built out a path for myself in U.S. federal litigation, and I don't know if people right out of law school are aware you can do that."

Pham is also one of the few Vietnamese American partners at one of the largest law firms in the country. Pham credits the culture at White & Case for appreciating diversity and recognizing his potential to move up.

As part of his work for his firm's Asian affinity network, Pham said they regularly put on mock trials of cases that involve Asian American litigants.

This year, Pham said they reenacted the 1981 case of a group of Vietnamese fishermen in Texas who successfully over claims the Ku Klux Klan destroyed their fishing boats and threatened their lives in a racist intimidation attempt.

The fishermen were successful at getting a federal judge in the Southern District of Texas to grant an injunction against the Texas KKK group, as well as repudiating the "profound deprivation" of the fishermen's constitutional rights.

"Something like the reenactments are special to White & Case," Pham said. "I remember we had one partner who was a lateral hire from another firm who came and said to me, 'Wow, I can't believe you do that here.'"

— *As told to Parker Quinlan.*

*Law360's MVPs of the Year are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals, and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2022 MVP winners after reviewing more than 900 submissions.*

All Content © 2003-2022, Portfolio Media, Inc.