

# AMANDLA!

African Women in Law Speaker Series

Vanguard Edition

Vol. 4



Institute for African Women in Law



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# WHY AMANDLA?

Amandla is a word that means "power" among the Nguni languages of South Africa. Amandla became a rallying cry against apartheid in South Africa and continues to be a rallying call for social justice.

The Amandla! African Women in Law Speaker Series is a **global diversity awareness program** that aims to amplify the achievements and stories of African women in law. The Series is a collection of short stories on women's achievements, challenges, resistance, resilience, and solidarity. Through this project, we hope to inspire, encourage, and provide hope for future generations of young women across the globe.

Women across Africa have made remarkable strides in the legal profession, yet these achievements are often hidden in global discourses on the legal profession. As a scholar-activist, I constantly encounter discourses and spaces that attempt to erase or marginalize the voice and agency of the African woman. Whether it is in the telling of our history, in decision-making processes, or in mainstream discussions, this erasure occurs in multiple spaces across the profession. From Algeria to Zimbabwe, women continue to play important roles in the fight for social justice.

However, women's sacrifices, bravery, and contributions to nation-building are frequently relegated to the annals of history, rendering their achievements invisible. The silencing of women's experiences finds expression in the "African" proverb "until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." The Amandla Series aims to disrupt the "hunter's story" by creating a platform for the "lioness" to be her own historian and tell her own story.

The roadmap to achieving the United Nations and African Union gender equality targets must begin with acknowledging the strength, resilience, and contributions of women. To loosely interpret the Akan Adinkra symbol, Sankofa— we should not forget our past, for it guides our future. Through legal narratives grounded in African storytelling, the series makes visible the professional trajectory of African women in law.

Through legal narratives and storytelling, African women in law **speak truth to power!**

J. Jarpa Dawuni, Ph.D.  
Founder and Executive Director

# Legal Narratives

"If the African woman's life experiences and story could only be told in the context of other people's lives and experiences, and not exclusively through her own voice, then how can she be independent of those external filters? Although her existence itself wouldn't be doubted, the objective reality of her identity would be obscured."

J. Jarpa Dawuni, Esq. Ph.D.

**Founder and Executive Director-- Institute for African Women in Law**  
**Quoted in Introduction to International Courts and the African Woman**  
**Judge: Unveiled Narratives (Routledge, 2018)**

"Legal narratives are an important tool in telling stories—especially those that would otherwise not get told. Storytelling is a salient part of the African and African-American experience."

Judge Gabrielle Kirk McDonald

**Former Judge/President, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former**  
**Yugoslavia (ICTY)**

**Quoted in Foreword to International Courts and the African Woman**  
**Judge: Unveiled Narratives (Routledge, 2018)**



## Ozofu Ogiemudia (Nigeria)

Partner, Udo Udoma & Belo Osagie's Corporate / Mergers & Acquisitions, Advisory and Private Equity teams (2014 – date).

I started working at the law firm of Udo Udoma & Belo-Osagie straight out of university, and long before I was sure of what I wanted to make of my career. I started as an intern and I am now one of the partners. It has been a long and tasking road (and there were times when I figured that there had to be easier ways to earn a living!) but one of the lessons I learnt with hindsight was that a big part of success can be attributed to staying the course, and giving your best along the way. It is important for young lawyers to make an early decision about whether they wish to practice the law, and if so, I would strongly encourage that they find a good firm where they can learn, and that they stay the course, giving their best all the time.

One of the high-points of my career was when I was asked to chair the technical advisory committee to the 8th Nigerian Senate that reviewed, and drafted bills to repeal and re-enact the Companies and Allied Matters Act 1990 (“CAMA”) and the Investments and Securities Act 2007. It was, at the time, the most demanding project I had ever supervised. I was humbled to have been entrusted with Nigeria’s 30-year old CAMA, which is the bedrock of company law in Nigeria – after all, there were several older and more experienced lawyers that could have been chosen, but I was chosen. Working with an excellent team, we produced the 2018 CAMA bill which was passed by the 8th National Assembly, and later passed with some amendments by the 9th Senate. I remain hopeful that the bill will be signed into law, thereby catapulting Nigerian company law out of the 80’s and into the 21st century!

I am most grateful for the virtue of staying power. My advice to other women in law is that you can have a successful career and also have a successful personal life. The war between work and life (i.e. work-life balance) did not begin with our generation, and even as far back as biblical times (Proverbs 31) there are records of successful women who were able to straddle both work and personal life demands. We are tougher than we know, and the more we keep pushing and do not give up even when it is very challenging, the more we open doors not only for ourselves but also for the generations of women and girls that are coming up behind us.



## Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Ph.D. (Kenya)

Professor, School of Law, University of Nairobi. First woman in Kenya and East Africa to be awarded a Higher Doctorate in Law.

I have made my path by walking it, having decided to take the less-traveled road in law - the academy. I did not have any women professors in law school, and I was the second woman to join the teaching staff at my university. I went on to become the first woman professor of law and dean. Being a woman of many firsts has come with many challenges. In many spaces, it has been like swimming against a tide. Despite the resistance, I have immensely enjoyed becoming a woman in and of the law. The pressure has brought out the diamond. The icing on the cake has been the many children in and of the law that I have birthed. Biologically a mother of two, teaching law is the space where I have propagated my progeny to thousands. Over 30 years and counting, there is nothing that I would love to do more than to teach and mentor the next generation of legal scholars.

Keep your eye on the ball, run your race on your terms without looking over your shoulder at the speed of those running their race beside you. As a woman in a sack race, you will have many things like children, spouse, aging parents, which make running difficult. Keep running even if the pace is slow. When you get to the finish line, your reward will be worth the while.



## Penelope Andrews (South Africa)

First Black Dean, University of Cape Town School of Law  
First Woman Dean, Albany School of Law, USA

My earliest encounters with strong women were the Dominican nuns, my high school teachers. After my mother died at the age of 33, when I was 13, the nuns were the earliest influences in my life, who provided the educational foundations for my chosen career in the law. Growing up as 'Coloured' in apartheid South Africa infused my lifelong commitment to racial and gender equality. I am greatly privileged to be actively engaged in the education of the next generation of legal professionals. In addition to teaching and mentoring students, and producing a body of scholarship, I have had the opportunity to serve as the first female dean at Albany Law School and the first Black dean at the University of Cape Town Law School.

What has allowed me to survive and thrive has been the love and support of a global network of scholars and social justice advocates. Nobody succeeds in the world without the encouragement, guidance and support of a range of people, known and unknown. It really does take a village. Therefore the guiding principle in our professional lives should be kindness, humility, interconnectedness and generosity. And always retain your sense of humor – the ability to laugh with other people – and at yourself. Leadership positions for women involve great challenges but also a range of opportunities. Leadership has taught me the 7 Rs: resilience (you need loads of it), respect (for yourself – and others), reputation (the most important thing you have, work hard to preserve it) rejuvenation (from time to time, you owe it to yourself) rejoice (your accomplishments and others, be grateful for the privileges in your life), relationships (key to your success and wellbeing); resistance (equip yourself to effectively fight sexism, racism, xenophobia, and other prejudices. As a woman, you will need it!).



## Rebecca Badejobgin, Ph.D. (Nigeria)

Director (Academics) Nigeria School of Law

First woman Director (Academics) from Northern Nigeria, Nigeria School of Law since its inception in 1962.

God has been very central to my professional progression. My father regarded education as very important for his girls and boys. With my mother's support, they made tremendous sacrifices to give priority to our education. Hence access to the first stages of my studies up to my first degree and vocational training were somewhat seamless. However, I had to surmount significant challenges even then, and also with the four postgraduate qualifications, including a Ph.D. in Law I eventually obtained. I commenced my career in a public interest organization where we gave free legal representation to indigent clients. I moved on to active private legal practice for some years before moving into academia. I have found satisfaction in my over 19 years of providing training for future generations of lawyers.

I am glad that my research and publications have added to debates and policies on contemporary issues in the legal profession, the government, and society. I am enthused and humbled by the opportunity to stand before sometimes about 1,700 students annually to disseminate knowledge, skills, ethics, and values, and to mentor several, including younger colleagues. Resilience and hard work always produce good results. That has been my experience. For women, juggling the home front with a career can be very daunting. I have found a growing fulfillment in combining the two regardless of the few setbacks that ensued. I acknowledge God in all these.



## Reini Alapini-Gansou (Benin)

Judge, International Criminal Court.

Former Commissioner and Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Former Professor of Law, University of Benin.

I would characterize my personality as "stubbornly resilient." My professional life has grown out of this resilient nature and the help I received from others along the way, but it was not a small task. When I was young, my biggest challenge was how to achieve my goals while my parents were unable to contribute financially to my education. Slowly, I succeeded. This long journey of challenges started from my secondary school throughout the university before I became a lawyer and now a judge. I relied on my hard work, dedication, and inspiration from others.

Today, I can look back and say with pride that I have done my part for my community and Africa. As a judge at an International Court, and with the same determination and conscientiousness, I will do my best for the world. Everyone can come to the summit when you believe in your capacity. As I look at my experiences, I can say that I have put in a lot of work, but I was never afraid to ask for help if needed. I never gave up even when I failed; I always started again. I know that professional working women are often overwhelmed. But I learned from my experience as former Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa that networking is vital for keeping one connected, focused, and visible. You must find the right networks and contribute to it as much as you draw out of it.



## Rose Ukeje, OFR (Nigeria)

Member, National Peace Committee of Nigeria, 2014 - to date.

Judge, Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal, Malborough, London, 2009-2014.

Chief Judge, Federal High Court of Nigeria, 2001-2008.

With the benefit of hindsight, I have been in the Legal Profession practically all my life. I went to the University of Nigeria in 1962. Thereafter, the Nigerian Law School, interrupted in 1966 by the Civil War. Returned to the Law School after the war and got called to the Nigerian Bar in 1971. As a result of the war, I followed my Husband to Zambia and was employed as an Assistant Legislative Draftsman. Returning to Nigeria, I joined the Federal Ministry of Justice as an Assistant Legislative Draftsman, Later became Deputy Legislative Draftsman, and was appointed the first female judge in the Federal High Court in 1986.

My first appointment as a Judge, was regarded as phenomenal. But my first posting from Lagos to Idiroko was rather punitive as the distance was about 100km away, with bad road conditions. My job at the Drafting Department during the Military Era toughened my resolve to surmount all difficulties on my. That saw me through the long service on the Bench. That resilience engendered my success on the Bench as I was later appointed in 2001, as the First Female Chief Judge of the Federal High Court, until I retired in 2008.

All my work from the Civil Service through the long service on the Bench, taught me that life is always a mixed bag. However, to the outsider, it appeared to be all glamorous and prestigious. You take the good along with the bad and also the grey areas in between. I am thankful to God for the opportunity provided me. Every situation has shaped me into a completely satisfied person.

I would therefore, strongly advise all upcoming young Women in Law, not to only perceive the good part, leaving out the unknown stormy side. They are all inseparable. It cannot be all sweet or bitter. There are stumbling blocks, banana peels. But garnered resilience and experience will steel and sail you through, depending on your outlook and perception of life. All in all, one must be a thorough bred mentor to generations coming behind.



## Sandie Okoro (Nigeria/UK)

Senior Vice President and General Counsel, World Bank.

When I was in primary school the teacher went around the room and asked everyone what they want to do when they grow up. I couldn't wait for my turn, so when the teacher came to me and said "Sandie what do you want to do?", I said I want to be a judge, I thought to myself now you have a sensible answer, she looked at me and said "little Black girls from Belham don't become judges." I did go on the path that could lead to that. It made me dig my heels in and say I am going to do it. I was born in South London, my dad was a teacher and my mum a nurse, my dad worked during the day, and my mom at night.... I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth, it wasn't as if I was a genius or anything. It is quite an ordinary story, and out of that I think I have done some groundbreaking things..... A big part for me was when I left my primary school where I had been told what I couldn't do, and I went to my next school and it was all about what you could do. You may think you need some great life experience or some great big success to be able to help someone along the way, but that is not true, because you become a role model without being asked to be, so if it is just telling stories of how you did things, then say it, and you don't know what people will draw from.

Quoted in Sandie Okoro's rise to the top video (Life at HSBC)



## Sheila Minkah-Premo (Ghana)

Founding Consultant, Apex Lawconsult, Ghana.

I have always been interested in law and development especially on women and children's rights. My master's in law (LL.M) on Women's Human Rights got me interested in policy and research. I have been involved in coordinating a number of legal research projects. In 2007, I submitted my application to coordinate a research project on the "Ascertainment of Customary Law on Land and Family in Ghana." This application proved to be a challenge in the beginning because it was perceived as a "male-led" project. In the view of some of the selection committee members, it was undesirable to have a woman coordinating it. I was shortlisted and interviewed by the Steering Committee for the Project— consisting of an all-male panel made up of chiefs and a number of senior judges.

The panel seemed uncertain about a woman coordinating their project and indicated that it was not a "gender" project and they were not sure I could handle it. I had previously coordinated other projects for a development agency, so their member on the panel convinced the Steering Committee to give me an opportunity to coordinate this project. I was selected to manage the project which came to a successful end with the publication of seven volumes of the findings in the Ascertainment of Customary Law series Volumes I-VII in 2011.

My experience with this project showed that women lawyers have to push to work in spaces regarded as the domain of men. With hard-work, dedication to excellence and a focus on standing strong despite all the challenges, they can achieve their purpose.



## Solomy Balungi Bossa (Uganda)

Judge, International Criminal Court.

Founding President, East Africa Law Society.

Former Judge, African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Former Judge, Court of Appeal, Uganda.

As a woman, I had to work twice as hard as any man to gain recognition and trust. One incident demonstrating this arose when I became the first woman President of the Uganda Law Society(ULS), and subsequently, the Founding President of the East Africa Law Society (EALS), that included, at the time, lawyers from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The Executive Council, and particularly, I as President, faced many questions at the meeting called to adopt the new Constitution for the EALS in Arusha, in 1995. We tried our best to answer them successfully. I got a backhanded compliment from a lawyer from Kenya, who told me that it was on that day that he understood why I, a woman, had been elected to lead the EALS. A leader is expected to model the values he/she touts and espouses and lead by example. This is a tall order, given that one is under public scrutiny for every word and deed, but it can be done. I have also learned to accept justified and unjustified criticism from the public and the government.

Activism exposed me to the need for women lawyers and judges (a privileged class) to improve access to legal and social justice. Decisions have to be made that may assist women and children who suffer disproportionately from inequitable distribution of resources, unfair customs and laws, and ensuing conflict at the family, national and international levels. I also realized that legal education, sensitization, and training are a powerful tool for overcoming prejudice by its ability to transform lives, especially for women and children. I am always gratified, and feel a sense of purpose and fulfillment, when I participate in legal training and education, through organizations or at the local level with my church and community. I see women's eyes opened to their plight and circumstances, and possibilities of finding solutions to them opening up. It also creates social capital for all participants. I have made several permanent friends in this regard. As women, let us continue to fight for the benefit of all other women.



## Stella Anukam (Nigeria)

Judge, African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights

To the glory of God Almighty, I have enjoyed a fulfilling career in public service. I rose through the ranks with promotions when due but this didn't happen without its challenges. As the pioneer Legal Adviser and Secretary for a government agency, I worked alongside the Board of Directors and Executive management. A shortage of staff at the agency's infancy meant I was bearing a brunt of the work to get the Agency on its' feet. I was misunderstood and faced opposition in some quarters but I remained diligent in my work. In my 10 years at the Agency, I worked with four Board Chairmen, seven Managing Directors and several Executive Directors—all male. What spoke for me was my work ethic, professionalism, and resolute loyalty to the well being of the Agency.

Women are nearer to emancipation than we can imagine. The world is waking up to the excellence, diligence and conscientiousness we bring to every space we occupy. I implore all African women to remain resilient, focused and steadfast as we strive to achieve fulfillment in various aspects of our lives. Remember that it's a marathon, not a sprint. We are endowed by God Almighty to do the extraordinary and go the extra mile. It is also important that we look out for, support and champion each other; we are unstoppable when we come together. I am eternally grateful for the sacrifices of the women before me and I commit to continue doing the work to amplify our voices and move the needle forward for African women in whatever way I can, so help me God.



## Sylvia Tamale, Ph.D. (Uganda)

Professor of Law

First Woman Law Dean, School of Law, Makerere University

At this time in my career, I breathe, think and dream decolonization and decoloniality! I believe that Africa urgently needs a radical overhaul of both its “software” and “hardware” to align them to its needs and interests. As Africans, we persist with colonial modes of production, governance, education, religion, culture, etc., with our thinking deeply enabled by default colonial applications. Take the power-full discipline/profession of law being celebrated in these pages. Law is a discipline firmly rooted in colonialism and imperialism. Not only is the law disconnected from the majority of Africans but it is largely used as a tool to oppress, control, exploit and sustain injustice. It is part of the Western siloed system that views the world from discrete lenses, giving the impression that disciplines/professions are incongruent and self-contained, having little, if anything, to do with each other. Far from being an individuated discipline/profession, law is heavily invested in every aspect of life. On its own, law fails to capture the interconnectedness of dynamic ecosystems. Hence, a well-rounded African should possess integrated knowledge in “living” laws, mathematics, science, history, politics, economics, the arts, etc. I expound on these issues in my open access book, Decolonization and Afro-Feminism (Daraja Press, 2020).

My counsel to women in law is to educate ourselves beyond the law and to remove the colonial blinders that narrow our focus and limit our ways of thinking and being. We need to soar high into the sky in order to discern the forest from the trees, to gain a holistic understanding of the necessary direction for lifting our rich and beloved continent out of the traps of coloniality and imperialism. Viva Afrika!



## Tujilane Rose Chizumila (Malawi)

Judge, African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights  
Former High Commissioner of Malawi to Zimbabwe and SADC  
Judge of the High Court of Malawi  
Former Public Ombudsman of Malawi

An elderly man with dusty feet opened the door into my office and instantly stopped in his tracks. He looked around peeping in all directions. I welcomed him warmly to take a seat as he seemed confused. But he said "sorry it's a wrong office." He quietly closed the door behind him only to walk in again within one minute. I welcomed him again but he gave me the same response and quickly left my office. I followed him to the reception and asked my secretary what the problem was. She explained that he wanted to see a lawyer to handle his case so she directed him to me. I invited him to follow me and offered him a seat again.

This time he sat down but he refused to share his matter with me saying "I am looking for a lawyer. Where is the lawyer?" When I responded that I was the lawyer, he roared "What, you are a lawyer? My case is too complicated for a woman. It needs a tough man!" I patiently and plainly explained to him that both female and male lawyers are taught by the same teachers, write the same exams and are treated equally.

I promised to handle his case without the requisite deposit until the day I won his case. He stood up, shook his head then sat down again and narrated his matter to me. It was a simple trespass of land. The day I won the case he sat glued to the court bench shaking his head. When I walked to him, he stood up and said in disbelief "Madam, you have won my tough case? You are a man!" Then he shook my hand. He faithfully paid my fee note and better still for over 2 years I received several clients from his village all referred to me by him.

There are many lessons I learnt from this old man. One was to never judge a client by appearance. I sued several of my well-dressed clients after they failed to pay me at the end of their cases. My message to my fellow women is that we have all been somewhere very tough and painful because of being a woman but we should always remain resilient, focused and support one another. My request to you all is let us be available for each other, at an instant, with a shoulder to cry on and a hand to lift each other up when the going gets unbearable which happens often. Let's build a sisterhood of support!



## Umu Hawa Tejan-Jalloh, GCOR, ORSL (Sierra Leone)

Retired Chief Justice of Sierra Leone

Former High Commissioner to Ghana

Fellow of the Commonwealth Judicial Education Institute, Canada

Member of the Judicial Council of ECOWAS

Honorary Bencher, The Honourable Society of Gray's Inn, London

Upon graduation from Harford School for Girls in 1964 and St. Edwards Secondary School for boys in 1965, where girls were only admitted in the sixth form, I won the Herald Tribune World Youth Forum Award in 1965, in New York, USA, where I represented my country among 25 other students from other countries. That was the beginning of my love for diplomacy. But with advice from elders, after graduation from Columbia University in 1971 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and Political Science, I decided to pursue a career in law in England. I attended the College of Law in London and did the Post Finals at the Council of Legal Education in London. In November 1974, I was called to the Bar of the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn.

Back in Sierra Leone, I was appointed State Counsel in 1975 in the Ministry of Justice, after which I served as Senior State Counsel and later Principal State Counsel. During that period, I acted as Locum Tenens for the Director of Public Prosecution appearing in all courts of the land, writing opinions and advising on various matters affecting the state.

In 1995 during the civil war in Sierra Leone, I was appointed High Court Judge and transferred to the provinces to do both civil and criminal cases. Those were difficult and trying times in the annals of my career as Judge and for the country as a whole. It is my fervent prayer that there will be no such recurrence. I served as High Court Judge until 2004 when I was elevated to the position of Justice of the Appeal Court. I remained there until 2007 when I was appointed Justice of the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone.

A year after my elevation to the Supreme Court of Judicature, I was appointed Chief Justice of the Republic of Sierra Leone, the first woman to hold that position in the history of the country. On my appointment as Chief Justice, I realised there were challenges in a male dominated society and judicial system. But I was blessed with mentors and a hardworking 'Ghanaian Consultant' (Master & Registrar), and a very good team of colleagues, who supported me through the years; and with patience, hard work and perseverance, we were able to meet our challenges.

My advice to the younger generation is for them to be diligent in their work no matter where they may find themselves in this noble profession, as there is dignity in labour. For those that might find themselves on the bench, always let your conscience be your guide in your dispensation of justice, because at the end of it all, there is nothing as beautiful as a clear conscience.



## Vera Duarte (Cape Verde)

Retired Judge, Supreme Court of Cape Verde.  
Former Commissioner, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

As the first woman Jurist and Attorney of the Republic in Cape Verde and the first woman to be elected Judge Counselor to the Supreme Court of Justice, I was able to work actively in achieving a legal-institutional framework that protects women's rights. In this sense, the Laws of marriage, endowing both spouses with equal status, abolishing discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate children, or the law of voluntary termination of pregnancy, which removes women from the need to have abortions illegally that are harmful to her health.

Today the Cape Verdean judiciary, both Judicial and Public Prosecutors, is practically equal. I therefore urge all women jurists to fight relentlessly against crimes against women such as sexual abuse, gender-based violence, femicide and other forms of attacks on the dignity of women.



## Yemisi Awonuga (Nigeria)

Partner, Templars Law Firm, Nigeria.

I owe my success to my parents, Christ, and a fair share of life's challenges, which I have had to embrace in my journey through life. I was not raised as a girl-child but as a human. In the words of my parents, "there is enough room at the top, and that is where you belong. So work for it." Yemisi, you must always ask yourself, am I still learning." If the question cannot be answered in the affirmative, it is time to take on new opportunities." These words were the compass for me. I have also been privileged to have been mentored by some of the finest minds in the legal profession. Excellence in legal service delivery is key, and your eye must always be on the ball.

Growing up in my household, you could not come back to my parents with a burst tire for a car you drove out. You were required to fix the tire, and there was no exception for me as a girl. As insignificant as this could sound, it blurred the mental limitations and spurred me on from my first degree in law and on to an LLM at the Cardiff University Law School and an MSc. at the Centre for Energy at the University of Dundee. To my fellow women, My journey has not been smooth. Still, the challenges I have embraced gave birth to the resilience, tenacity, and maturity required to stay focused. Embrace your challenges; acknowledge your mistakes; review why the mistakes were made so you do not repeat them. Set your goals; be determined to get up if you fall, celebrate your wins, and talk to God. Be consistent and only give up on a dream, if you have the conviction so to do.



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