



African Women in International Courts

A Digital Archive Series

Vol. 1





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Women in International Courts

African Women and International Courts is a digital archive of brief descriptions of the career journeys of African women working in various international courts and tribunals. This archive was created to highlight the journeys, and historicize the legacy and contributions of African women working in international courts.

For a comprehensive look into the lives of some of these trailblazing women, click to read:

[Dawuni, J & Kuenyehia, A \(eds.\). 2018. International Courts and the African Woman Judge: Unveiled Narratives. Routledge Press.](#)



Akua Kuenyehia (Ghana)

International Criminal Court (ICC)

Akua Kuenyehia is an eminent Ghanaian lawyer, academic, and human rights advocate whose impact on legal practice and education is evident at both the national and international levels. She was born in Akropong, Ghana, and attended the prestigious Achimota Secondary School in Accra. She attended the University of Ghana where she graduated with a Bachelor of Law degree (LLB, Second Class Upper Division) at the Faculty of Law in 1969. In 1970, she obtained a professional diploma and was subsequently admitted to the Ghana Bar in 1971. She then proceeded to Somerville College, Oxford University where she completed a Bachelor of Civil Law (BCL) in 1972. In 1972, Kuenyehia began her academic life as a lecturer at the Faculty of Law in the University of Ghana— an appointment that made her Ghana's first woman law professor. In that same year, she began a lectureship position at the Ghana Workers College.

At the University of Ghana Faculty of Law, Kuenyehia became a senior lecturer in 1985 and an associate professor in 1996. In 1996, she became the first woman to be appointed as Dean of the Faculty of Law, a position she occupied until 2003. In 2001, she became the acting director of the Ghana School of Law. In 2013, she was inducted as the President of Mountcrest University College, a private university in Accra, Ghana. Kuenyehia has also occupied visiting academic positions in institutions outside Ghana, including Temple University, Imo State University, Northwestern University, Leiden University, and the University of Pennsylvania.

Her research is mainly focused on human rights, international law, and gender. The highlight of Kuenyehia's legal career is her pioneering role in the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, where she served as a judge from 2003 to 2015. Not only was she one of the eighteen judges elected by the Assembly of States Parties (ASP), she was also one of three African women elected to the ICC at its initial formation. She also became the first vice president of the ICC from 2003 to 2009, playing a pivotal administrative role during the formative stages of the court.



Amina Mallé Sanogo (Mali)

ECOWAS Court of Justice

Aminata Mallé Sanogo is a Malian politician and magistrate who was appointed Mediator of the Republic of Mali. Sanogo received her Master's degree in Legal Sciences from the University of Dakar, and a Magistrate's diploma from the National Center for Magistrates' Training in Bamako, Mali. She worked in litigation for the General Secretariat of the Government before becoming an examining magistrate in 1983.

As a magistrate, she was put in charge of the cases of minors at the Bamako Court of First Instance. She also served as a substitute of the Public Prosecutor from 1985 to 1989, as examining magistrate of the 2nd Cabinet of Bamako's Court of First Instance from 1989 to 1991, and as examining magistrate of the 1st Cabinet at the Special State Security Court in 1991. She then became President of the seconded section of the Court of First Instance of Commune IV of Bamako from 1992 to 1994.

From 1994 to 2000, she was President of the Commercial Court of Bamako, and she briefly served as President of the Court of First Instance of Commune III of Bamako towards the end of 2000. In 2001, she represented Mali at the ECOWAS Court of Justice, where she served as judge-advisor before becoming president of the Court from 2007 to 2009. She served as technical advisor to the Prime Minister's office in August 2010, where she was in charge of the Governance Unit, and in 2015, she became Minister of Justice and Human Rights. She served in this capacity until July 2016 and became Secretary General on January 9th, 2017. Ms. Sanogo was appointed Mediator of the Republic of Mali on October 13th, 2020.



Aminatta Lois Runeni N'gum (The Gambia)

International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals
(IRMCT)

Aminatta N'gum was born on June 7, 1953, in Harare, Zimbabwe, and is a Gambian national by marriage since 1981. She earned a B.A. Joint Honours in Law and Sociology from the University of Keele, the United Kingdom in 1978 and was called to the Bar of England and Wales in July 1979. She has been a member of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn since 1977. Aminatta received an LL.M in Public International Law with an International Criminal Law Specialisation from Leiden University, the Netherlands, in 2005.

Judge Aminatta N'gum served the Judiciary of The Gambia as a Magistrate from 1980 to 1990 and Master of the Supreme Court from 1990 to 1994. She then transitioned to Private Legal Practice from 1994 to 1998 and 2009 to 2010. Additionally, she was the first Judicial Secretary from 1998 to 1999 and was appointed Judge of the Gambian Court of Appeal from the High Court from 2010 to 2011.

Beginning in 2012, Judge N'gum served as a Judge of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals. During this period, she has actively participated in amending and finalizing the Draft Mechanism Rules of Procedure and Evidence as well as the Code of Professional Conduct for Mechanisms Judges. Prior to this position, Judge N'gum served as a Legal Officer at the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) from 1999 to 2009. Ngum's work in this capacity began in Arusha, Tanzania, in the Court Management Section as Deputy Chief, and sometimes Officer-in-Charge. She was then reassigned as Head of the Appeals Support Unit in The Hague and subsequently to Arusha in the Defence Counsel and Detention Management Section as Deputy Chief and Head of Section and later Officer-in-Charge. She finally returned to the Court Management Section as a Legal Officer and Coordinator.

Judge N'gum has occupied other enviable positions including Assistant Editor for the 1994 Gambia Law Reports, Senior Counsel to the Commission of Inquiry into Land Administration (1994-1998), and Part-Time Law Lecturer at The Gambia Technical Training Institute. Further, she is recognized as a founding member of both the Soroptimist International of Banjul and The Gambia Women Finance Association.



Andresia Vaz (Senegal)

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)

Andrésia Vaz was born on February 4, 1944, in Senegal. She graduated from the National Centre for Law Studies (Centre National d'Etudes juridiques) in France in 1969. Andresia began her career as an Examining Judge of the Tribunal de Première Instance de Dakar. She was subsequently appointed President of the Labour Tribunal in Saint Louis, Senegal, and later Chief of the Examining Judges in Dakar as well as Vice President of the Tribunal de Première Instance de Dakar. Andrezia was also a junior lecturer at the Senegalese National School of Administration and Magistracy until 1991. Judge Vaz was further promoted to the Court of Appeal and became the President of the Court in 1992. A year later she was appointed President of the National Electoral Commission of Senegal and in 1997 she became the first President of the Supreme Court of Senegal.

In 2001 Judge Vaz was elected by the United Nations General Assembly as a judge of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania. She was re-elected in February 2003 and became Vice President of the Tribunal. Vaz was a member of the Appeals Chamber which is common to both the ICTR and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at The Hague, Netherlands. She ended her tenure with the Tribunal in May 2013.

Throughout her career, Judge Vaz has participated in several conferences, including the Conference of Chief Judges of the Commonwealth and Judges of Appeal Courts, and the International Federation of Women Lawyers' "World Peace Through the Law" conference. She is a member of the International Union of Magistrates, the International Commission of Jurists (Associate Member), and a member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Netherlands.



Arlette Ramaroson (Madagascar)

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)

Arlette Ramaroson was born on August 14, 1944, in Diego Suarez, Madagascar. She obtained a Bachelor's degree in Law in 1973 and a Diploma from the Institute of Legal Studies a year after. Judge Ramaroson began her legal career as a Deputy State Prosecutor for Diego Suarez in 1974 and was appointed Examining magistrate and a judge of the Criminal Court of Antananarivo in 1975. Three years after serving in this capacity, she was appointed Vice-president of the court. In 1986, she was promoted to the Court of Appeal of Antananarivo and became President of the Criminal Division of that Court two years later. Judge Ramaroson was elected a member of the governing body of the Supreme Court and Acting President of the Supreme Court Criminal Division in 1990.

Her exceptional leadership skills led to her appointment as Director of International Relations in the Ministry of Justice, Madagascar in 1998. A year after serving in this role, she was elected Commissioner of Human Rights by Presidential decree. In addition to her judicial responsibilities, Ramasoror teaches civil and criminal law at the University of Madagascar.

Judge Ramaroson's international career commenced with her appointment as a member of the preparatory committee on the establishment of an International Criminal Court in New York sometime in 1997. She was further elected as a judge of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Arusha, Tanzania in 2001. Again, from 2005 to 2006, she occupied the position of Vice President of the tribunal and continued to serve the tribunal after her tenure as Vice President until 2011. Judge Ramaroson then joined the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in October 2011, serving until 2015. Outside judicial circles, Ramaroson is religious and is known to have co-founded the Pan-African Christian Women's Alliance (PACWA) in Madagascar.



Awa Nana Daboya (Togo)

ECOWAS Court of Justice

Justice Awa Nana Daboya is a Togolese lawyer and former judge with over 30 years of legal and political experience. Justice Daboya has served her country in the legal and political spheres for over 30 years.

She began her career as a lawyer before becoming a magistrate, an examining magistrate, and dean of examining magistrates. Justice Daboya then became a marriage and guardianship judge before being elected to the Court of Appeal. She has served as President of the Togolese Court of Appeal, and as chair of the Independent National Electoral Commission of Togo. Justice Daboya spent ten years serving as a judge of the ECOWAS Regional Court, two of which she spent serving as President. She also served as Mediator of the Republic and chaired the High Commission for Reconciliation and Strengthening of National Unity (HCRRUN) in Togo in 2014. Justice Daboya received training in Cameroon, France, and the USA.



Bensaoula Chafika (Algeria)

African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights
(ACtHPR)

Justice Bensaoula Chafika is an Algerian jurist who was elected judge of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights for a six-year term in January 2017. Justice Chafika received a Doctorate in Public Law and is a lecturer at the National School of Magistracy in Algeria. At one point in her career, she also served as Director of the Department of Legal Studies and Documentation at the Ministry of Justice. Other positions she has taken up include Inspector of Administrative and Judicial Courts and member of the Board of Directors of the Institut de Droit et Justice.

She has been a judge of the Criminal Affairs Chambers and Court of Appeal in Algeria and was nominated for the International Narcotics Control Board by the Algerian government in 2016. As a judge in the Criminal Affairs Chambers, she handled cases related to delinquents. Justice Chafika was elected to the African Court in 2017, alongside Justice Tujilane Chizumila. The two women were sworn in at the same time, historically lifting the number of women in the court up to five. This enabled the African Court to reach the gender parity requirement stated in Article 12(2) and Article 14(3) of the Protocol that established it. Justice Chafika was elected to the Court during the 28th Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union and was appointed during the 44th Ordinary Session of the Court in March 2017.

She has written several publications on administrative matters, including 'The issue of mediation in Algerian Civil and Administrative Procedure Code', 'Conciliation in Administrative Matters', and 'Enforcement of administrative judgments by the administration'. She speaks French, Arabic, and English.



Clotilde Mukamurera (Rwanda)

Common Court for Eastern & Southern Africa
(COMESA)

Clotilde Mukamurera was born in 1971 in the Southern Province of Rwanda. From a humble background in Nyamagabe, she had her secondary school education at Ecole Sociale de Karubanda. After which she earned her first degree in Law at the University of Rwanda. Clotilde holds a Master of Laws degree in Business Law from the University of Cape Town in South Africa and has trained in banking, procurement, arbitration, leasing, and intellectual property.

Judge Mukamurera's judiciary career began in 2000 as a Judge at Gisenyi Intermediate Court and later Vice President of the Rusizi Intermediate Court. She has served as a member of the High Council of the Judiciary since 2008. Before being elected to serve as a judge in the Court of Justice of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) – First Instance Division, Justice Clotilde Mukamurera served as a Commercial High Court Judge and continues to serve in that position. She was elected to serve COMESA after garnering 13 of the 15 cast votes. She is one of the three women serving on a panel of seven members at the First Instance Division.



Clotilde Médégan Nougbedé (Benin)

ECOWAS Court of Justice

Clotilde Nougbedé is a Beninese judge who served in the ECOWAS Court of Justice from 2009 to 2014. Prior to serving on the ECOWAS court, she was President of the Supreme Court of Justice in Benin. In her professional capacity, Nougbedé has served on the Board of Directors for Ecobank Benin, as Chief of Staff of the Minister of Justice in Benin, and was a founding member and President of the Association of Women Lawyers of Benin (AFJB). She also served as one of two female Presidents of the High Court of Justice in Benin between 2003 and 2009. She is currently an auditor for the Benin Chapter of the International Association of Women Judges.



Dupe Atoki (Nigeria)

ECOWAS Court of Justice

Honorable Justice Catherine Dupe Atoki is a Nigerian lawyer and judge of the ECOWAS Court of Justice. She has been working in legal practice for over forty years. Justice Atoki received her Bachelor of Laws from the Nigeria Law School, and her LLB from the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria. She also has an Advanced Postgraduate Diploma in International Human Rights Law from the American University Washington College of Law.

Justice Atoki has served as a senior lecturer in Business and Administrative Law at the State Polytechnic Kaduna, a member of the Nigerian Human Right Commission, and as a member of the Federal Government Presidential Committee on the review of laws discriminatory of women, as well as the Committee on the reform of investment law. Additionally, she has also served as a legal consultant for the African Union, as a member of the election monitoring/observer team for several countries, and as commissioner for the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. She was a member of the Governing Council of the National Human Rights Commission and has helped draft several legal documents with the African Union.

She was the first Nigerian woman to be appointed to the role of Chair at the African Commission and has used her position to make sure Africa's voice is heard at the United Nations. At the Commission, she is the rapporteur on prison and detention in Africa and the chairperson on the Committee for the prevention of torture. Justice Atoki has delivered papers on the topic of human rights, and she has a newspaper column titled 'The African Torture Watch'.



Elizabeth Gwaunza (Zimbabwe)

International Criminal Tribunal for the former
Yugoslavia (ICTY)

Elizabeth Gwaunza was born on June 15, 1953, in Zimbabwe. She holds a Diploma in Women's Law from the Women's Law Centre in Zimbabwe, a Diploma in Legislative Drafting, and another Diploma in Adult Education. Elizabeth has a Certificate in Gender Studies and Development and an honorary Master's degree in Women and Gender Development from the Women's University in Africa.

Elizabeth was admitted as a legal practitioner of the High Court of Zimbabwe in 1987. She became the first director of Legal Affairs in the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs and also worked as a director of Legal Aid in the Ministry of Justice. She was appointed as a Judge of the High Court in August 1998 and was eventually promoted to the Supreme Court in 2002. History was made when she became the second woman to sit on the Supreme Court after Justice Vernanda Ziyambi. Her hard work and integrity culminated in her appointment as the Deputy Chief Justice of the Constitutional and Supreme Court of Zimbabwe.

Judge Gwaunza's international career started with her appointment to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), where she worked from 2008 to 2013. Her profound experience with both governmental and non-governmental organizations is noteworthy. She was founding member and past president of the Zimbabwe Association of Women Judges and member of the International Association of Women Judges.

Judge Gwaunza co-founded and was the national coordinator of the Women and Law in Southern Africa Research Project from 1989 to 1995. She further served on the boards of the Musasa Project and the Women's Leadership and Governance Institute. In addition to the above-mentioned achievements, she chaired the Wills and Inheritance Project – a joint venture of DFID and the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs. One of her notable firsts is being one of two black female law students who were the first to graduate in Zimbabwe.



Elizabeth Ibanda Nahamya (Uganda)

International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT).

Elizabeth Ibanda-Nahamya is a Ugandan High Court judge who was appointed in March 2009. She holds an LLB from Makerere University in Kampala (1975), a Post Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice from Law Development Centre, also in Kampala (1976), and a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of New Haven, USA (1980).

Elizabeth Ibanda-Nahamya's career commenced as an Assistant lecturer with the Law Development Centre, Kampala in 1976 for about a year. She transitioned to private practice working as an advocate with Mawaali & Co. Advocates from 1979 to 1980 and later as a Senior Legal Assistant at Katende, Sempebwa & Co. Advocates from 1990 to 1992. Elizabeth worked as a part-time lecturer with the Central Bank of Lesotho and the National University of Lesotho Maseru from 1980 to 1981, teaching Law of Contract and Company Law. She subsequently obtained a permanent role in the legal academy at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria from 1981 to 1989. In 1993, Elizabeth started her own firm under the name Ibanda Nahamya & Co. Advocates. Her depth of knowledge in International Criminal Law, Human Rights, and International Humanitarian Law led to her appointment as a judge for the International Crimes Division of the High Court of Uganda from 2009 to 2017.

Judge Ibanda-Nahamya's international career began six years after she started her firm. She became the Trials Chamber Coordinator for the United Nations Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Arusha in Tanzania. Eight years after working diligently in this position she was appointed as Deputy Principal Defender and later as Principal Defender for The Special Court for Sierra Leone set up jointly by the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations. In 2013, Ibanda-Nahamya was appointed as judge of the United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT). Judge Ibanda-Nahamya has previously engaged in consultancy for the Ministry of Finance and the World Bank. She has also participated in numerous conferences throughout her career and is a member of both local and international associations contributing immensely towards their development and impact.



Elsie Nwanwuri Thompson (Nigeria)

African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights
(ACtHPR)

Elsie Thompson is a judge of the High Court of Rivers State, Nigeria. Born and raised in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, she earned her Bachelor of Laws degree from Queen Mary College University London and was admitted to the English bar in 1984. A year later, she was admitted to the Nigerian bar after receiving vocational training from the Nigerian Law School, and spent 20 years working on human rights cases in private legal practice.

In 1998, Junior Chamber International named her one of its 'Ten Outstanding Young Persons of the year'. She was heavily involved in the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA). Cases that she covered ranged from inheritance to divorce settlements, domestic violence, matrimonial causes, and maintenance. She served as State Chairperson from 1997 to 2001, Deputy Country Vice-President from 2001 to 2003, Country President from 2003 to 2005, and as Regional Vice-President for Africa from 2005 to 2008. She was also the first Nigerian to be elected to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights for a six-year term in 2010.

Whilst at the Court she served as Vice President from 2014 to 2016. Thompson dedicated herself to service relatively early in her career by launching a law clinic where lawyers offered free legal services to less fortunate individuals who were incarcerated without legal representation. This initiative earned her a State Merit Award in 1986 and was replicated across Nigeria so that more indigent individuals were given access to pro-Bono legal representation. Other awards that she has received include the Trail Blazer Award from the Nigerian Bar Association Women Interest Section and FIDA Nigeria's Award of Excellence. She is a member of the National Association of Women Judges Nigeria, the Honorable Society of Gray's Inn, and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators UK.



Emily R. Kayitesi (Rwanda)

East African Court of Justice (EACJ)

Justice Emily Rusera Kayitesi is a Rwandan judge who served as judge of the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) from 2008 to 2013. Justice Kayitesi served as Vice President of the Court and was a Justice of Appeal. Court cases that Justice Kayitesi was involved in included The Attorney General of the Republic of Kenya v. Prof. Anyang' Nyong'o & 10 others and The Attorney General of the United Republic of Tanzania v. African Network for Animal Welfare (ANAW). Justice Kayitesi also served as a judge of the Kigali Supreme Court, and as Programs Officer of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in the early 2000s.



Fatoumata Dembele Diarra (Mali)

International Criminal Court (ICC).

Fatoumata Diarra was born on February 15, 1949, at Koulikoro in Mali. She holds a certificat de licence en droit (LLB) from the University of Dakar (1971), a maîtrise en droit privé (LLM in private law) from the Mali École Nationale d'Administration (French National College of Public Administration) (1973) as well as a diploma in Implementation of Regional and International Standards for the Protection of Human Rights. She is also a graduate of the École Nationale de la Magistrature (French National School for the Judiciary).

Fatoumata began her legal career as an Examining Magistrate and then became Deputy Public Prosecutor. She was subsequently appointed as National Director for the Administration of Justice in Mali from 1999 until August 2001. Other positions occupied by Diarra throughout her local career are President of the Criminal Chamber and Chamber of Assize of the Court of Appeal of Bamako and judge of the Constitutional Court in Mali. She is currently the President of the Council of the Université des Sciences Juridiques et Politiques de Bamako.

In 2001, she was elected ad litem judge for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) where she served for two years. She was subsequently appointed judge at the International Criminal Court (ICC) where she served as the First Vice-President of the Court between 2009 and 2012. She further worked with the International Committee of the Red Cross on humanitarian law and with the Agence de la Francophonie (Agency for the Francophone World) within the framework of the Preparatory Committee on the draft Rules of Procedure and Evidence and on the definition of the Elements of Crimes which fall within the jurisdiction of the ICC.

Judge Diara is recognized as the founder of several organizations including the Pro Bono Center for women and children in Mali, Association des femmes jurists which she founded in 1976, the Office on Relief for Impoverished Women and Children, and the Women's and Children's Rights Monitoring Body (Observatoire des droits de la femme et de l'enfant). Again, she was the Vice-President of the International Federation of Women in Legal Careers (IFWLC).



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