



IAWL MAGAZINE

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Institute for African Women in Law

WOMEN WHO INSPIRE



A Decade of Honoring Excellence

The Institute for African Women in Law (IAWL) is a nonprofit, non-governmental organization established in 2015. It is committed to supporting the formidable works of women in law across the continent of Africa and the Diaspora. Our mission is to be a focal point for addressing issues across the legal and judicial professions. The institute is headquartered in Washington, DC, USA.

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The Institute for African Women in Law

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Executive Summary

The IAWL Magazine is an annual publication profiling women legal professionals across Africa and the African diaspora who are inspirational figures in their home countries and abroad.

This year's edition holds special significance. We proudly spotlight seven extraordinary women in law who were honoured as award recipients during **IAWL's 10th Anniversary celebration**, recognising their outstanding contributions to the legal profession and their enduring impact on advancing justice, equality, and leadership.

Through their dedication, expertise, and influence, these women have not only distinguished themselves in their respective fields but have also created pathways of opportunity for other women in law. Their work reflects courage, innovation, and a steadfast commitment to challenging systemic barriers and redefining leadership across the profession.

These women were selected for their significant contributions and notable achievements in the profession. This included their leadership positions held, awards, and achievements.

We selected a diverse group of women to profile in the magazine with specific consideration of sector, geography, and generational diversity.

Sector diversity: We focused on women working in the three IAWL priority areas of the legal profession: the Bar, Bench, and Academia.

Geographic diversity: The women profiled were selected from four regions (West Africa, Southern Africa, Central Africa, and the African Diaspora).

Generational diversity: We featured women legal professionals with extensive experience and young women legal professionals in the early stages of their careers.

This list will inspire and motivate others to continue striving for excellence in leadership and to push for positive change. We now present seven women in law who have made monumental contributions and whose impact will undoubtedly shape the future of African women leaders in law!

J. Jorpa Dawuni Ph.D.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Poem by Dr. Sandie Okoro OBE

In honor of IAWL awardees

DAUGHTERS OF JUSTICE

We are daughters of justice, carved out of flame,
Standing tall in our purpose, unshaken in name.
From Johannesburg's bright skyline to Lagos' warm light,
African women rise boldly—keepers of right.

We walk paths once trodden, we break open doors,
Where silence once lingered, our advocacy roars.
With vision unclouded and courage untamed,
We honour our foremothers, proudly proclaimed.

In courtrooms, in boardrooms, wherever law lives,
Our wisdom is steady, our voices forgive.
We shape fairer futures with each word we defend—
Our law is our compass, and justice our friend.

So here's to the women who lead without fear,
Who rewrite the story each year after year.
May our triumphs be many, and our burdens be few,
And may every young girl know her dreams can come true.

To the sisters beside me—tonight we stand tall.
African women in law—there is room for us all.
May our legacy echo in all that we do:
Fierce, brilliant, unyielding—unyoked, and true.

ANN CLAIRE WILLIAMS

*Former Judge of the United States
District Court
for the Northern District of Illinois*



My path to the bench was shaped long before I reached it—through diligence, teaching, and courage. I stepped into spaces where women, particularly Black women, were unseen, but with perseverance and the support of allies, I helped change what was possible.



Leadership Profile

Hon. Ann Claire Williams (Ret.), a trailblazer and leader, heads Jones Day's efforts to advance the rule of law in Africa. Devoted to promoting the effective delivery of justice worldwide, particularly in Africa, she has partnered with judiciaries, attorneys, NGOs, and the U.S. Departments of Justice and state to lead training programs in Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Liberia, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and Zambia.

She has also taught at the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. President Ronald Reagan nominated her in 1985 to the U.S. District Court, Northern District of Illinois, making her the first woman of color to serve on a district court in the three-state Seventh Circuit.

In 1999, President William Clinton's nomination made her the first judge of color to sit on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit and the third Black woman to serve on any federal circuit court. She brings her vast experience on the bench to serve as a resource for the Firm's leading trial and appellate practices.

She has served on many judicial committees and, as treasurer and president of the Federal Judges Association, was the first person of color to become an officer. Committed to public interest work, she helped found Just The Beginning — A Pipeline Organization, the Black Women Lawyers' Association of Chicago, Minority Legal Education Resources, and the Public Interest Fellowship Program for Equal Justice Works.

She serves on the boards of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Human Needs Project, Weinstein International Foundation, Museum of Science & Industry Chicago, University of Notre Dame (emeritus) and National Institute for Trial Advocacy (NITA) (emeritus), the Board of Counselors for Equal Justice Works, and chairs the Advisory Board of the International Law Institute-South African Centre for Excellence. She was chair of the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary from 2021 through 2024.

Desiree Finca

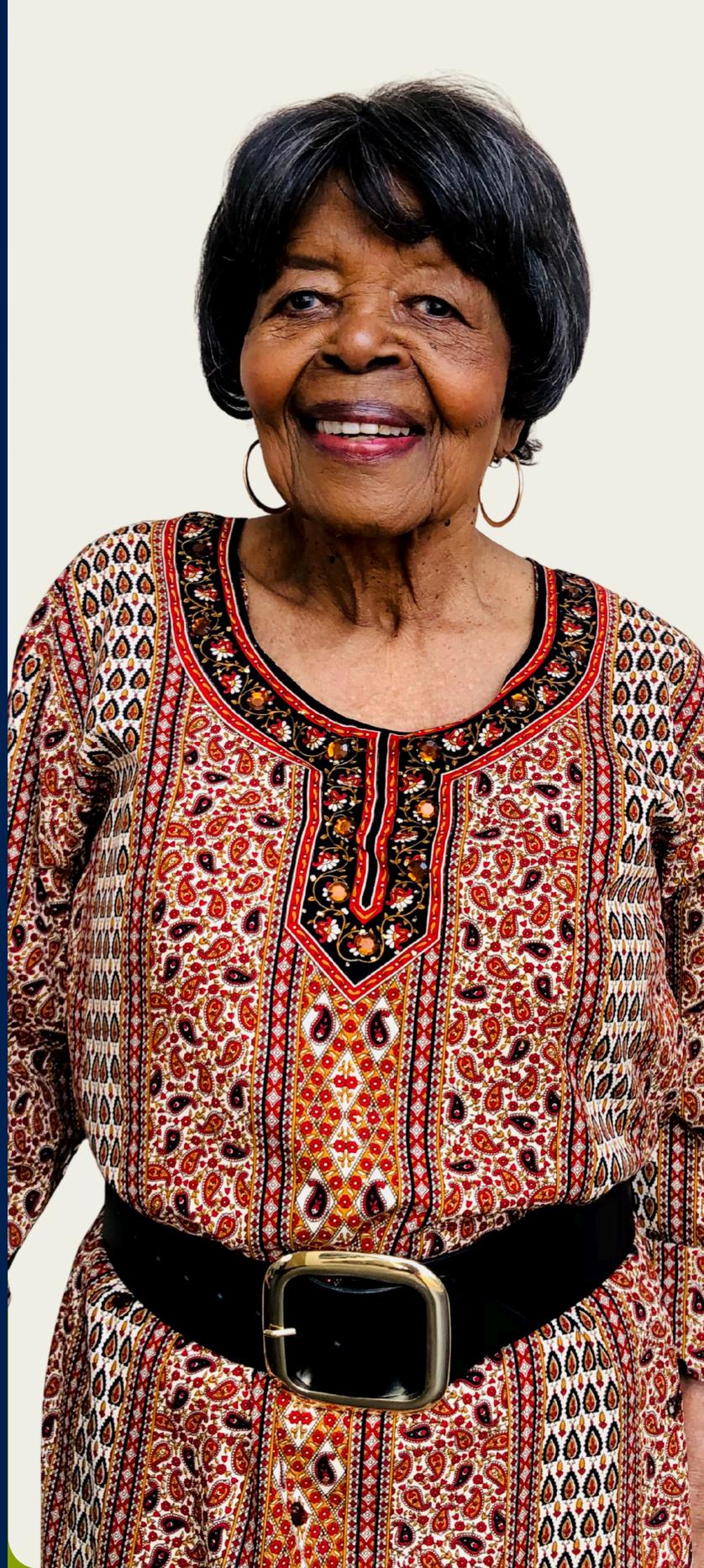
*First Black, Female Attorney in
Apartheid South Africa*



Male allies must rise, open doors, nurture, and create space for women to thrive.

Without such support, many women—including my grandmother—may never have realised their potential.

*-Phozisa Mkele & Yolisa Mkele,
on behalf of Ms. Desiree Finca*



Leadership Profile

Desiree Mamsie Finca was born in a small village called Zimbane, in Mthatha, Eastern Cape, on March 10, 1928. She is the eldest and last surviving of three siblings. She began her academic journey at St John's Primary School before later attending Healdtown High School, where she completed her matric.

From a young age, Ms. Finca had lofty ambitions and aspired to study at the University of Fort Hare. Unfortunately, her father had other ideas and insisted she enroll for a teaching qualification, known as a Post Matric in Domestic Science (PMDS) at Healdtown. Given the prevailing ideas of the day and because her mother had passed away when she was only five, Ms. Finca's father wanted his daughter to enroll for this course to ensure she could manage a home once she got married.

Upon completing the PMDS qualification, Ms. Finca met and married Nimrod Mkele in 1952 and moved to Johannesburg. The marriage was short-lived and ended in divorce in 1961. Ms. Finca was now at a crossroads, realizing that she could not feed and educate three children on a teacher's salary. Finally having the chance to direct her own destiny, Ms. Finca enrolled in a law degree at Unisa.

She served her articles under Mr. Douglas Lukhele, a Swazi national who was later deported back to Swaziland by the South African government due to his political affiliations and activism. Ms. Finca then joined the Mandela-Tambo law firm as an articled clerk until she was admitted to the bar in 1968.

After her admission to the bar, she joined the law firm of Mr. G.M. Pitje and, after years of hard work, became a partner. Becoming the first Black, female attorney had its challenges. Ms. Finca battled racism and misogyny. At the time, most magistrates were white males who had never seen nor heard of a Black woman lawyer. As a result, the magistrates would often not allow her into their courtrooms without first verifying her status as a practicing attorney with the authorities. To mitigate against this relentless discrimination, Ms. Finca had to constantly carry and produce a certificate of registration to the magistrates. Despite producing the registration certificate, there was an occasion where one of the magistrates rudely requested that she provide the name of a white lawyer in Johannesburg so that he could call and confirm that she was indeed a practicing attorney. She was appointed as a Master of the Mthatha Supreme Court in the 1980s and served in that position until her retirement.

Ms. Finca had three children; the firstborn, Ntombentsha, is now deceased. She also has five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. Ms. Finca now spends her time with her daughter, Pumla, and they live in Brackenhurst.

DIANA ASONABA

DAPAAH

*Former Deputy Attorney-General and
Deputy Minister for Justice, Ghana*



It takes a village—the people, family, mentors, and institutions that shape the leader you become—and mine taught me that true leadership is rooted in kindness: if you cannot ease the burdens of others, do not add to them.



Leadership Profile

Diana Asonaba Dapaah is a former Deputy Attorney-General and Deputy Minister for Justice of the Republic of Ghana and the youngest female to have served in that capacity. Ms. Dapaah is a Partner of Sam Okudzeto & Associates, one of the leading law firms in Ghana, where she brings her over 15 years of experience to bear in handling complex cases before the Superior Courts and lower courts of Ghana.

She is one of the founders of the Ghana ADR Hub and serves as its Vice President. Ms. Dapaah is a Notary Public and an arbitrator with the Ghana Arbitration Centre and the Ghana ADR Hub.

Until her appointment as a Deputy Attorney-General & Deputy Minister for Justice, Ms. Dapaah was a lecturer in law at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), where she taught Corporate Law and Governance, Public International Law, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), and Human Rights Law. Ms. Dapaah has returned to GIMPA, where she lectures at the School of Public Service and Governance in law and governance courses.

As a trainer in ADR and Human Rights as well as a World Bank certified trainer in corporate governance, she has trained lawyers, judges and ACCA members in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Ms. Dapaah has also served as a consultant for both local and international institutions including the EU's Accountability, Rule of law and Anti-Corruption Programme (ARAP) and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), Ghana.

In June 2020, Ms. Dapaah was named one of Africa's 50 Most Promising Young Arbitration Practitioners by the Association of Young Arbitrators. In 2019, Ms. Dapaah started a DANIDA-funded PhD program in business and human rights at the University of Cape Town, focusing on access to remedy for business-related human rights abuses towards ensuring responsible business conduct.

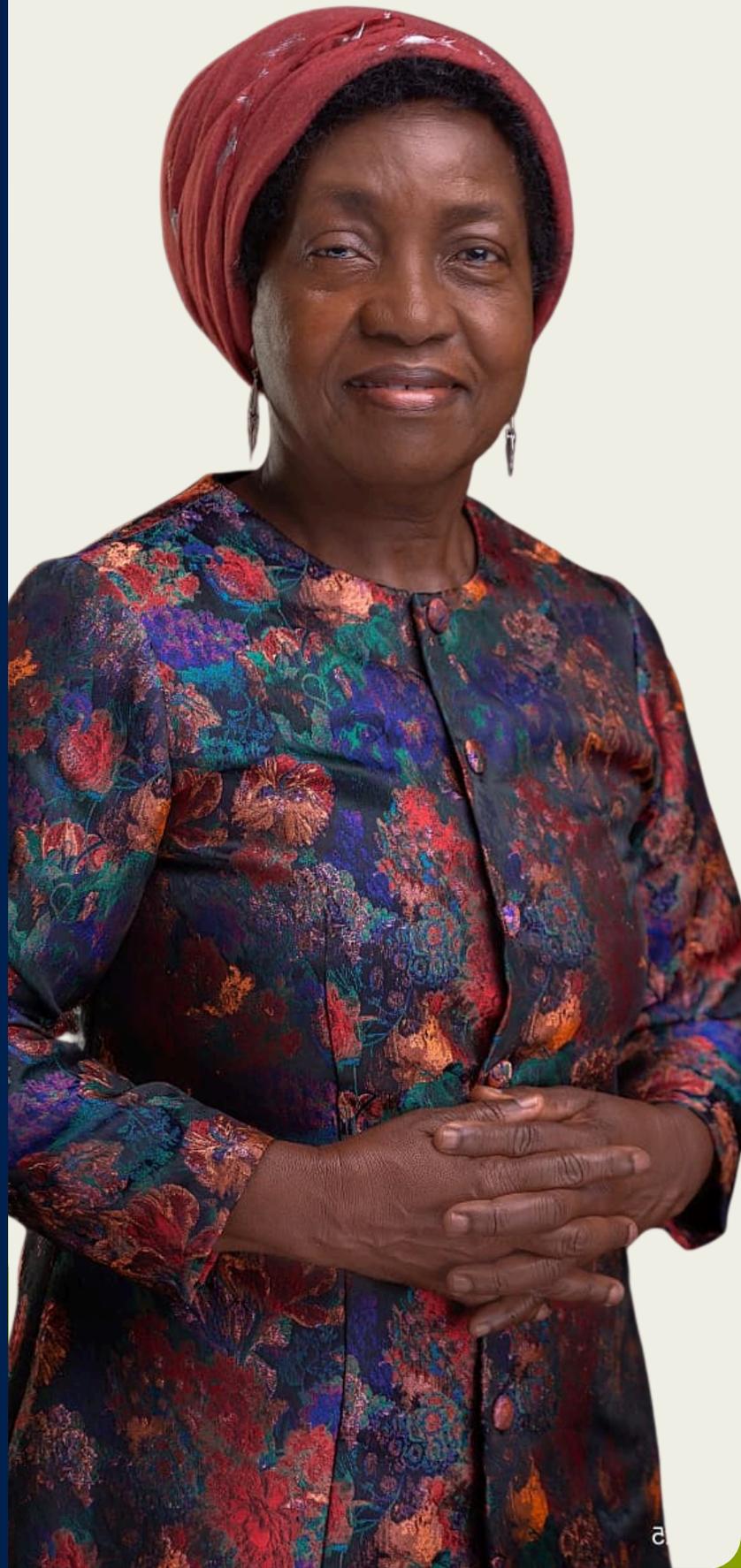
Ms. Dapaah graduated from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology with first-class honors in law and from the Fordham University School of Law, where she graduated with an LL.M. (cum laude). Ms. Dapaah is a member of the Ghana and New York bars.

FLORENCE MUMBA

*International Jurist and
Former Judge, Supreme Court of
Zambia*



The legal profession is about frontiers—of knowledge, justice, human rights, and equity. When women are given room to excel, they break barriers and redefine what is possible.



Leadership Profile

Justice Florence Ndepele Mwachande Mumba, admitted to the Bar in 1973, is a pioneering Zambian jurist whose career has spanned national and international service. She began as Legal Aid Counsel before becoming Director of the Legal Aid Department in 1977. In 1980, she made history as Zambia's first female High Court Judge, later rising to the Supreme Court in 1997.

From 1989 to 1997, she served as the first female Investigator-General (Ombudsman), championing accountability and good governance, and helping promote ombudsman institutions across Africa. Between 1986 and 1994, Justice Mumba chaired three Presidential Commissions of Inquiry on the National Provident Fund, the Vice President's road traffic accident, and public service conditions.

From 1992 to 1994, she was Director for Africa on the International Ombudsman Institute Board, later serving as its Vice-President until 1996. She was also a Commissioner on the International Commission of Jurists (1994–2003) and member of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (1992–1995), where she contributed to key resolutions recognizing rape as a war crime and advanced global gender justice.

Internationally, she was elected Judge of the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 1997, where she presided over notable cases including Prosecutor vs. Furundzija, Kunarac et al., and Milan Simic. She served as Vice-President of the ICTY (1999–2001) and later as Judge of the Appeals Chamber for both the ICTY and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) from 2003 to 2005.

Justice Mumba also chaired the Electoral Commission of Zambia (2008–2010), where she introduced nationwide counting of ballot papers at polling stations. In 2009, she was appointed International Reserve Judge at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), later serving as International Judge of the Supreme Court Chamber (2012–2023). She currently continues to serve on a part-time basis.

Beyond her professional duties, Judge Mumba actively promoted women's rights, participating in the 1985 UN Conference on Women in Nairobi and the 1994 Beijing preparatory conference, later serving on the UN Commission on the Status of Women, where she helped draft resolutions recognizing rape as a war crime. Judge Mumba has made significant contributions to legal scholarship, authoring works on the ombudsman institution and international criminal law. Her publications include "The Ombudsman: The Need for Protection and Control" (1995) and many more, reflecting her deep engagement with justice and human rights.

Her outstanding service has earned numerous honors, including the 2023 White & Case Distinguished Jessup Alumni Award, the Schweppes Service Award (1976), and Zambia's National Great Commander, Distinguished Service (First Division). Justice Mumba remains an icon of integrity, pioneering leadership, and lifelong commitment to justice, women's empowerment, and the rule of law.

PENELOPE ANDREWS

First Black Dean at the University of Cape Town Faculty of Law (South Africa) and Albany Law School, USA

Even after four decades away, my commitment to South Africa and the African continent never wavered. Mentoring, supporting professional achievement, and returning to academic leadership were all part of my purpose—to give back.



Leadership Profile

Penelope Andrews joined New York Law School in January 2019 and teaches courses in torts, professional responsibility, gender equality, racial justice, and the law. She is Director of NYLS's Racial Justice Project and directs the NYLS Summer Abroad Program in Rome.

She began her teaching career at Australia's La Trobe University, where she taught for eight years before moving to the City University of New York School of Law, where she taught public international law, gender and law, race and law, comparative law, and torts for 15 years. She has held visiting appointments at law schools across the U.S. and internationally, as well as senior leadership positions, including serving as the first Black Dean at the University of Cape Town Faculty of Law (2016–2018) and the first female Dean and President of Albany Law School (2012–2015).

Professor Andrews is actively engaged in international collaborative research and mentoring networks, and is committed to making law and society scholarship relevant to global academic communities. She is an editor of the *International Journal of Law in Context*, the *Human Rights and the Global Economy E-Journal*, and the *African Law E-Journal*. She's authored books and articles focusing on comparative constitutional law, gender and racial equality, human rights, the judiciary, and legal education.

Her research on the judiciary in South Africa bridges theory and practice, exploring judicial transformation, particularly the appointment of female judges. She was a trainer with the Judicial Institute for Africa, served as an Acting Judge of the North Gauteng High Court in Pretoria for the 2018 third term and acted as an arbitrator in racial discrimination hearings.

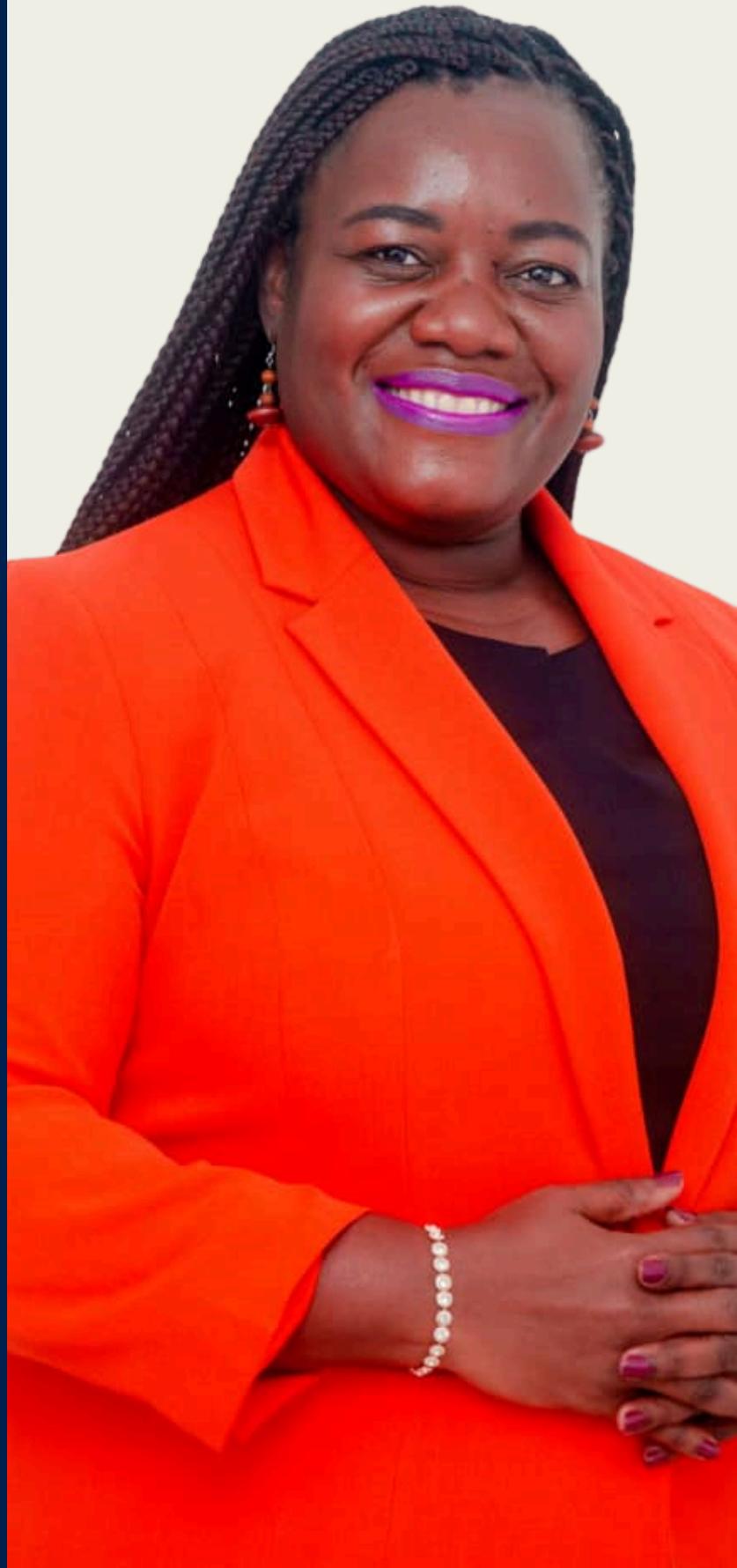
She has served on law school committees and the boards of public interest and human rights organizations, including the Africa Section of Human Rights Watch and the National Center for Law and Economic Justice. From 2019 to 2021, she served a two-year term as the President of the Law and Society Association. She also recently served as Chair of the Board of the Institute for African Women in Law, and serves on the advisory groups at the National University of Ireland, Galway and the University of Johannesburg.

Professor Andrews has received many awards, including a 2022 Honorary Degree in Humane Letters from Franklin University in Switzerland, the 2024 Deborah Rhode Leadership Award from the Association of American Law Schools and the Legacy Impact Award from the Minority Section of the Association of American Law Schools.

She is a regular media commentator on South African legal issues and matters of racial justice.

Rosine Bela Eyebe

*International Justice Lawyer
and Gender Justice Specialist*



“The fight against impunity—especially for sexual and gender-based crimes is never easy, particularly in post-conflict societies. Yet I believe every survivor deserves dignity, equality, and justice. That belief sustains me when the path is uncertain, the obstacles overwhelming, and progress slow.”



Leadership Profile

Ms. Rosine Bela Eyebe is a distinguished international jurist from Cameroon, with over fifteen years of experience in human rights, international criminal law, and the administration of justice at both national and international levels.

She currently serves as a Judicial Affairs Officer, Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Specialist, and Gender Focal Point within Justice and Corrections Section of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), based in Bangui. In this capacity, she provides strategic and technical support to national judicial institutions in their efforts to combat impunity and strengthen the capacity of domestic courts to adjudicate international crimes, particularly those involving conflict-related sexual violence.

Ms. Bela Eyebe has played a pivotal role in facilitating access to justice for survivors of sexual violence, especially women and girls and in promoting the adoption and implementation of protective measures for victims and witnesses during criminal sessions across the country. Her efforts have contributed significantly to increasing the number of cases of sexual violence brought before the courts and more generally, to advancing accountability for crimes against women and girls in the Central African Republic.

Prior to joining MINUSCA, Ms. Bela Eyebe began her career as a magistrate in Cameroon before serving with renowned international judicial institutions, including the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. In these roles, she focused on the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of international crimes, with a particular emphasis on sexual and gender-based violence.

Subsequently, she served as a Technical Expert with the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), where she was the first expert deployed long-term to the Central African Republic. In this role, she supported the work of the national specialized police unit investigating sexual violence against women and girls and provided technical assistance to judicial actors for the prosecution of such cases.

Ms. Bela Eyebe is an alumna of the National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM) in Cameroon, holds a Maîtrise in Fundamental Private Law from the University of Yaoundé II-Soa, and a Master's degree in International and European Law of Fundamental Rights from the University of Nantes in France.

SANDIE OKORO OBE

*Former Senior Vice President and
General Counsel of the World Bank
Group*

“This recognition carries a profound responsibility to the generations of African women who paved the way for us. IAWL stands as a beacon, creating space for women to rise, lead, and thrive. As daughters of justice, may we keep standing tall in our purpose.”



Leadership Profile

Dr. Sandie Okoro OBE is an internationally known, preeminent and highly respected lawyer with a distinguished career in global financial and legal leadership. She is the first female Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, a role that reflects her commitment to education, leadership, and social impact.

Most recently, Sandie served as Group General Counsel at Standard Chartered Bank, where she oversaw the Legal, Group Corporate Secretariat, and Shared Investigative Services functions as a member of the Bank's Group Management Team. Prior to this, she served as General Counsel and Senior Vice President, as well as Vice President for Compliance, at the World Bank Group, where she played a pivotal role in shaping global financial governance.

During her tenure, Sandie created, ran, and led the World Bank's Anti-Racism Task Force, established in response to the murder of George Floyd. Under her leadership, the Task Force drove institutional change, advancing racial equity and inclusion within one of the world's most influential financial institutions. She has also served as General Counsel for HSBC Global Asset Management and Global General Counsel at Barings, cementing her reputation as a leader in international finance and law.

Sandie's contributions to the legal profession, diversity, and international finance have been widely recognized. In 2024, she was awarded an OBE for services to diversity in international finance. She is also an Honorary Bencher of Middle Temple (2018) and was named one of the Top 20 Global General Counsel (2019) by the Financial Times. She has been recognized multiple times by The Powerlist, ranking as the 5th most influential person of African and African Caribbean heritage in Britain (2018) and the 10th most influential (2023).

Her achievements have been celebrated with Honorary Doctorates in Law from City University London (2014), London South Bank University (2018), and her alma mater, the University of Birmingham (2019), where she was conferred the degree of Doctor of the University (DUniv). She has received the UK Black Solicitors Network's Lifetime Achievement Award (2016), the Howard University Vanguard Women Award (2019), and the Beyond the Glass Ceiling Award (2019), among many others. In 2020, she was an honoree of Harvard Law's International Women's Day Portrait Exhibit. She is also a recipient of the prestigious Freedom of the City of London.

Sandie is the inaugural Chair of the UK-based Women of the World Foundation, a Governor of the Royal Shakespeare Company, and holds an honorary lifetime Emeritus membership of the Law Societies' Compact and Forum for Sustainable Development Goal 16. Sandie continues to shape the legal profession, champion diversity and inclusion, and inspire the next generation of leaders on a global scale.

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