



Pioneer African Women in Law

A Digital Archive Series

(Vol. 4)



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WHY PAWLP?

The Pioneer African Women in Law Project (PAWLP) is a digital archive initiative created to highlight the works and achievements of African Women legal professionals who have paved the way for the women coming after them. These trailblazers have shown the world what a woman in the legal profession can do and, in doing so, have enabled other women to do the same. IAWL shares these women's stories through the website portal as well as on social media.

PROPER ATTRIBUTION

We welcome usage and citation of the materials in this booklet. The entries contained in this booklet remain the intellectual property of the Institute for African Women in Law. Proper citation and referencing is required for usage.

Suggested citation:

Last, First names. Year of publication. Title of the piece. Available at [insert link]. Retrieved [enter date of retrieval].

Example:

Koech, Karen. (2020). Nancy Baraza: First woman Deputy Chief Justice of Kenya. Available at <https://www.africanwomeninlaw.com/african-women-in-law/Nancy-Baraza%2C-Ph.D>. Retrieved April 1, 2021.

OUR R.A.D.I.C.A.L APPROACH

Restoring and preserving the historical agency of the African Woman in Law

Analytically appraising the contributions of African Women in Law

Demarginalizing the voices of African Women in Law

Intellectually centering the lived experiences of African Women in Law

Conscientiously mainstreaming the contributions of African Women in Law

Agenda setting for research on African Women in Law

Leading the way for future generations of African Women in Law



Pamela Towela Sambo, Ph.D. (Zambia)

First Woman Doctorate in Environmental Law (Zambia)

By O'brien Kaaba

Pamela Towela Sambo was born in a relatively large middle-income family in the city of Kitwe on 8th November 1974, the fourth born child to Agnes Sambo and late Bernard Sambo. She has three elder brothers, one young brother, and two younger sisters, making it a family of seven siblings. Her mother worked as a secretary while her father worked in local government finance. Sambo started her education at Hindu Hall nursery school in the town of Luanshya in 1980 before beginning grades one to six at Gandhi Primary School. She fondly remembers her teachers, who, during those formative years, were her earliest role models and inspired her to reach greater heights. In 1986, Sambo's father was transferred from Luanshya District Council to Chingola Municipal Council and she had to start term two of grade six at Nakatindi Primary School, where she only attended class for a month before being moved to Sacred Heart Convent School where she finished grade seven.

From 1988 to 1992, Sambo attended Fatima Girls Secondary School in Ndola. In 1994 she was admitted into the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zambia, a steppingstone towards studying law at the University of Zambia. After a year in the Humanities, she progressed into the School of Law, and graduated with her Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree in 1998, among the best graduating students. Sambo proceeded to study for the bar at the Zambia Institute of Advanced Legal Education (ZIALE) and was admitted to practice law in April 2000 alongside several current serving judges and senior legal practitioners.

Having completed her primary legal education Sambo dreamed of being a top corporate lawyer. By then, she had never heard of environmental law. Sambo worked in private practice for Ellis and Co and also Mvunga Associates between 1998 and 2002 when she left to pursue a Master's Degree (LLM) in environmental law, more by accident. She narrates her story that since 2000, she had been applying for university places and scholarships under the guidance of Dr. Leonard Kalinde, who knew that she wanted to pursue further studies in corporate law. One morning in December 2001, Dr. Kalinde called her and asked if she was interested in pursuing LLM environmental law in South Africa. She responded that she was not interested as she didn't even know what it was all about. She eventually bought into the idea of pursuing a Master's program in environmental law and processed all the paperwork sent to her.



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A few days later, she received an email that she had been selected on the program mainly because the International Union for Conservation (IUCN) sponsored LLM environmental law program had been ongoing for several years, and there had been no student from Zambia, despite numerous adverts and environmental concerns in the country at the time. In mid-January 2002, Sambo arrived at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg, to join the LLM environmental law class as the first Zambian amongst Zimbabweans, South Africans, Tanzanians, and Tswanas. All the other students had pursued environmental law in their undergraduate courses, unlike Sambo, who was new to the subject. Professor Michael Kidd, who was the course coordinator, was very instrumental in orienting Sambo to environmental matters. By the end of the six months' course work, Sambo was able to present a research proposal which examiners deemed worthy of being advanced as doctoral studies.

After completing the LLM program, Sambo worked as Assistant Legal Counsel (Corporate Affairs) at Copperbelt Energy Corporation Plc (CEC) and later as Legal Counsel at the Local Authorities Superannuation Fund (LASF), between 2003 and 2007. In September 2007, she was awarded the Commonwealth Scholarship to pursue her doctorate in environmental law at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom. She graduated in 2012 and immediately started working at the University of Zambia as a lecturer and researcher, making her the first female Zambian lawyer to earn a doctorate in environmental law.

Sambo has been instrumental in designing and teaching environmental law courses at the university. She is also the leading national legal consultant in environmental matters. At the university level, Sambo has not only contributed to the appreciation of environmental law by students (future lawyers and administrators) but has also taught a culture of hard work, meticulousness, attention to detail, and thoroughness. She has a passion for teaching and research and generously passes these skills to her students. She is demanding but patient with her students. Many of her former and current students have fond memories of her. Lukundo Kapinga, a former student and now practicing law under a premier corporate law firm describes Sambo as follows: "Dr. Sambo greatly improved our reading culture by providing us with reading materials and encouraging us to read widely. Her door was always open for consultations or for us to get further clarity when needed. Her commitment to teaching can be seen in the fact that she is always willing to go the extra mile for her students. She often scheduled additional classes for her students when she noticed that her students were lacking". (Transcripts available on file with author).



Pamela Towela Sambo, Ph.D. (Zambia)

First Woman Doctorate in Environmental Law (Zambia)

By O'brien Kaaba

Beatrice Chola, a recent law graduate of the University of Zambia notes: "She is one powerful lady, who knows what she wants to do with her life. She is organized and very professional. She has high standards I would want to emulate. From the way she carries herself, it is enough to see and notice that she is really hardworking and never takes no for an answer; excellence and hardworking are her personal brand". Similarly, Emmanuel Mutale, a current law student describes Sambo with fondness: "She is very demanding yet very patient with students. She requires students to read a lot and to research. At the same time, she is very patient with those that require extra guidance and help from her. This, in my view, brings out the best in all students". (Transcripts available on file with author).

Sambo has pioneered the teaching of environmental law at the University of Zambia. Her teaching went beyond the School of Law, where she is tenured, but also helped in the School of Education and the School of Natural Sciences. These courses commenced in 2003 and are still running. Within the School of Law at the University of Zambia, Sambo has helped develop a specialized environmental law program for postgraduate studies at the Master's level. Beyond the university frontiers, Sambo is actively involved with research and cooperation at the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (the national institution responsible for sustainable environmental management), such as drafting subsidiary legislation and conducting stakeholders' consultative forums on different aspects of environmental law.

Sambo is also a recognized international environmental researcher and consultant. She has been involved in international research and collaboration in various aspects of environmental law, such as the possibility of drafting framework legislation for sustainable soil management in Africa, sustainable wildlife management, and timber legality in Zambia. At a professional level, Sambo is an active member of the Association for Environmental Law Lecturers in African Universities (ASSELAU), Committee of Environmental Lawyers under the IUCN, International Law Association (ILA), International Bar Association (IBA), and Law Association of Zambia (LAZ). She has offered training and mentorship in environmental law, locally and internationally, to various audiences, including policymakers, legislators, scholars, and judges.



Pamela Towela Sambo, Ph.D. (Zambia)

First Woman Doctorate in Environmental Law (Zambia)

By O'brien Kaaba

Sambo has pioneered the teaching of environmental law at the University of Zambia, generously sharing her knowledge and skills with those who may shape the future of the country as future legal practitioners, judges, administrators, corporate lawyers, and civil servants. This was achieved while married and raising four children. This invariably means that she had to straddle the responsibilities that come with being a wife, a mother, and a legal scholar and practicing lawyer. In a country where patriarchy is conventional and women are often pushed into subordinate roles, this makes Sambo a truly remarkable pioneer who has overcome several hurdles and now stands not only as an accomplished female professional but also as a model for young female students who may face similar challenges in life. In a country where mining drives the economy (and often results in environmental problems), her environmental law skills place her at the heart of the discourse on national development and environmental sustainability.

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

First Woman Law Professor (Kenya)

By Brenda Wangila

Annie Patricia Kameri-Mbote was born on 19th March 1964. She was born in a family of nine and grew up in the countryside. The family consisted of three girls and six boys, and her parents treated boys and girls equally. There was no differentiation in the performance of house chores further evidenced by her parent's decision to send her to school, just as her brothers. Her father, Venanzio Kameri, and mother Helen Njeri strongly believed in the power of education. Her father was keen to observe Patricia's determination in the quest for education together with helping in the performance of chores such as fetching water and firewood, making food for the family, working on the farm, and going to school at the same time. She narrates that she developed an interest in law while in the third year of secondary school following a presentation by a guest speaker, Ms. Muteshi who gave a career talk in law. She was particularly moved by the presentation, poise, and mastery of the subject that the guest speaker exuded and it appealed to her. Later on during her pupilage, she would choose the unchartered path of academia and not the practice of law which she considered elitist.

Kameri-Mbote's early education began at Mugoiri Primary School in Murang'a County. She was later transferred to a boarding school at St. Michael's Primary School in Kirinyaga County, Kenya for her upper primary studies and sat the Certificate of Primary Education examinations in 1976. She later proceeded to Loreto High School, Limuru in Kiambu County for her Ordinary and Advanced level studies, completing them in 1982. In 1984, she began her L.L.B undergraduate studies at the then Faculty of Law, University of Nairobi which she completed in 1987, and obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Law, Second Class (Upper Division Honors). She furthered her studies in the United Kingdom at the University of Warwick obtaining a Master's Degree (L.L.M) in Law and Development in 1989. In the same year, she was admitted to the Roll of Advocates following successful completion of her course at the Kenya School of Law in 1988, obtaining a Postgraduate Diploma in Law. It was during her pupilage as part of the Kenya School of Law training that she nurtured her interest in academia by spending more time at the law firm's library reading and researching.

From 1994 to 1995, on study leave to Zimbabwe, she underwent training in gender and the law which led to a Postgraduate Diploma in Women's Law at the University of Zimbabwe. She proceeded to Stanford University for doctoral research on a Fulbright junior staff development scholarship. Kameri-Mbote obtained a Master's Degree in Juridical Sciences (JSM) in 1996 and earned a doctorate from Stanford University in 1999 specializing in property rights and environmental law. Kameri-Mbote is described as a "woman of many firsts."



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

First Woman Law Professor (Kenya)

By Brenda Wangila

She is on record as the first female professor of law in Kenya in 2011. She is also the first female dean at the University of Nairobi, School of Law for the period between 2012 and 2016. In 2019, she was recognized as the first woman in East and Central Africa to come up with a higher Doctorate of Doctor of Laws in her thesis which is yet to be published titled “Contending Norms in a Plural Legal System: The Limits of Formal Law.”

Her professional achievements during her tenure as the first female dean at the School of Law include breaking the record in terms of the number of doctoral degrees that were developed. This was followed by the recruitment of young academics at the school of law. She oversaw the revision of the school's law curriculum to incorporate other subjects. Further, she oversaw the refurbishment and modernization of the facilities which led to the accreditation of the two satellite campuses in Kisumu and Mombasa.

As a professor of law, she has published extensively in the areas of gender, environment and natural resources, property (land and intellectual property), and science and technology. In 2017, the University of Oslo awarded her an honorary degree in law because of her significant contribution in studying the cross-section of women's, environmental law, and law and development and her immense research in these areas. She has and continues to give talks as a guest professor in universities around the world in the above areas. Harvard Law School International Women's Day in 2019 recognized her as one of the honorees who is inspiring change globally.

The contributions made by Professor Kameri to law and the legal profession are in the field of legal academia by becoming the first female professor in law in Kenya and the first woman Dean at the School of Law, University of Nairobi. In the legal profession, Professor Kameri has conferred the rank of Senior Counsel in 2012 as per the Advocates Act under section 17 which states that “the President may grant a letter of conferment to any person of irreproachable professional conduct who has rendered exemplary service in the legal and public service in Kenya conferring upon him the rank and dignity of Senior Counsel.” She made a further contribution with her appointment as the first female dean at the University of Nairobi's school of law.

Her experience in agitating for equal employment benefits for female staff to be at par with the male staff is phenomenal in opening doorways for women in academia and equality at the workplace.



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

First Woman Law Professor (Kenya)

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Her achievements in the profession rebut the predominant notion of viewing academia as a field for men only. Kameri-Mbote is also an active researcher with several publications and policy papers. Her research interests lie in the areas of Environmental Law, Gender, Law Science and Technology, International Law, and Property law which she terms as a "labor of love." She published over fifteen books, written four theses, over twenty journal articles, and more than twenty book chapters challenging thinking in various areas of the law. Having chosen to immerse herself in academia, Kameri-Mbote has scaled the academic heights in law.

Kameri-Mbote was appointed as a member of the Committee of Eminent Persons by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Kenya in February 2006. The task of the Committee was to advise the government on the way forward for the stalled constitution review process. In 2015, she was honored with the "Elder of the Burning Spear (EBS)" pursuant to section 4 (b) of the National Honours Act No. 11 of 2013 which covers persons who have "made an exemplary contribution to the country or a county in the economic, social, scientific, academic, public administration, governance, sports, journalism, business, security or other fields." She has mentored several students in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, South Africa, the United Kingdom as well as the United States. She has imparted knowledge to many young, eager legal minds throughout her career as a lecturer at the University of Nairobi since 1994. In 2019, she applied for the position of Vice Chancellor for the University of Nairobi, she was interviewed and emerged as the third of nine candidates.

Her immense contribution, in collaboration with other women, to Kenya's 2010 constitution-making process is notable. The constitutional review process ensured that the lived experiences of women in Kenya are captured in the supreme law of the land. In 2019, she was part of the discussion on possible constitutional changes through the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI). One mantra Kameri-Mbote lives by was made by Woodrow Wilson that "You are not here merely to make a living. You are here to enrich the world." With this in mind, it is my considered view that Kameri-Mbote, as a pioneer in the field of academia has, and continues to enrich the world through her academic work.



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

First Woman Law Professor (Kenya)

By Brenda Wangila

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Prisca Matimba Nyambe (Zambia)

Judge, International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals.

By Mawusi E.A Kudu

Judge Prisca Matimba Nyambe is a bold, remarkable, and inspiring example of legal brilliance. An admirable polyglot, apart from English she is fluent in Tonga, Soli, Nyanja, Bemba; with a working knowledge of French, Swahili, and Lozi. She has left her mark at home in Zambia and internationally by playing critical roles as a judge in novel courts in the pursuit of justice; working in private practice; and organizing and participating in conferences throughout Africa, Europe, and the United States on the rights of women and children, gender-based war crimes, human rights, and democracy. This piece attempts to give a glimpse into her life as a legal trailblazer.

Judge Prisca Matimba Nyambe was born on December 31, 1951, in Zambia. She graduated with honors from the University of Zambia with a law degree in 1975. She was admitted as an advocate of the High Court of Zambia in 1978, and in 1982, she was admitted as an advocate of the High Court of Zimbabwe. Nyambe began her career as a Resident Magistrate in Kabwe, Zambia in 1978 and worked in this capacity until 1980. She advanced to the rank of Senior Magistrate and served on the bench in Harare and Gwelo, Zimbabwe from 1980 to 1984. Nyambe then transitioned to the advisory position of Legal Counsel to the Central Bank of Zambia and worked in this capacity from 1984 to 1992. She transitioned again and started work as a private legal practitioner from 1992 to 1996.

After the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, a yawning gap for justice opened. In February 1996, Judge Nyambe joined the novel International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania, as a Senior Legal Officer. With support from the Tanzanian government and the team at the ICTR, Nyambe helped develop the tribunal from a three-office structure to a behemoth of justice. Prisca was at the forefront of the humble beginnings of the tribunal. She played a key role in bringing the first three suspects from Zambia on indictment to the tribunal; marking the first of many trials that would take place at the ICTR, with Zambia as the first United Nations Member State to cooperate with the Tribunal. She rose through the ranks at the ICTR from 2000-2002, occupying roles as the Senior Legal Officer, Chief of the Court Management Section, and Chief of the General Legal Services Section. In 2002, she was appointed General Counsel to the ICTR and served until 2006.



Prisca Matimba Nyambe (Zambia)

Judge, International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals.

By Mawusi E.A Kudu

In 2005, she was elected Ad Litem Judge of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and sat on the trial of Zdravko Tolimir, a wartime Bosnian Serb general convicted of genocide for his role in the 1995 Srebrenica massacre. Judge Nyambe was the sole dissenting judge and wrote in a thirty-six-page dissenting opinion that she would have acquitted Tolimir of all charges. In 2011, she was elected as a judge of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals. Nyambe finally served as a Judge of the High Court of Zambia from 2006 until her retirement in 2015.

Judge Nyambe's legal career has included several political and societal appointments. She was appointed Council Member of the Law Association of Zambia and served from 1982 to 1994. In 1989, she was appointed by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Zambia as a member of the Parliamentary Fact-Finding Committee to investigate and report on discriminatory laws against women in government and state-owned enterprises. Championing the pursuit of democracy, she played a key role as founder and member of the Zambia Independent Monitoring Team (ZIMT), which monitored the multi-party Presidential and Parliamentary elections in 1991.

Judge Nyambe's dynamism was evident in her role as Commissioner of the Election Commission of Zambia and Patron of the University of Zambia Law Association in 1992. The next year, she was appointed by the Minister of Finance as a member of the Study Group to Research and Reform the Financial System in Zambia. In 1994, she served as Board Member of the Zambia Revenue Authority, member of the Board of Directors of Cavemont Merchant Bank, and Vice-Chairperson of the Law Association of Zambia. Her sterling qualifications led to her appointment as Consultant to the Zambia Privatization Agency in 1995.

Nyambe's impressive legal career has been recognized by a multitude of international organizations. She was awarded a Letter of Recognition as an Outstanding Participant to a Foreign Investment Negotiation Seminar by the International Law Institute in 1985. In 1989, she was awarded a Certificate of Merit for Distinguished Services by the International Biographical Centre and was nominated International Woman of the Year 1991/92 by the same organization. In 1999, she received Letters of Recognition from two Judges of the ICTR.



Prisca Matimba Nyambe (Zambia)

Judge, International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals.

By Mawusi E.A Kudu

The President of the Republic of Zambia in 2005 honored Judge Nyambe with the rank and dignity of State Counsel. Judge Nyambe has also made significant contributions to legal discussions. She has organized and participated in symposia across Africa, Europe, and the United States on the rights of women and children, gender-based war crimes, and integration of international standards in national structures.

In an interview for the project Voices of the Tribunal, Nyambe stated “We have to accept the totality of the judicial function, the guilty are found guilty, the innocent are found innocent”. Judge Nyambe played a pioneering role at the ICTR in establishing a reliable international criminal justice system and producing a massive body of jurisprudence on genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and forms of individual and superior responsibility. She was part of a team at the ICTR which delivered verdicts on genocide, defined rape in international criminal law, and recognized rape as a means of perpetrating genocide.

Nyambe remains a part of a team of judges of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, created by the UNSC to address residual matters arising from the ICTR and ICTY working remotely.

On September 2, 2019, she was appointed to the Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC) Governing Board by the President of the Republic of Zambia. Nyambe's illustrious career is replete with several contributions to international law and justice with a focus on the rights of women and children. Her works serve as a guide and inspiration for people around the world.

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Qinisile Mabuza (eSwatini)

First Woman Lawyer and Judge (eSwatini)

By Cassidy Strong

Qinisile M. Mabuza is a historic legal figure in her home country of Eswatini, a small landlocked nation in the southernmost region of Africa. Not only is she Swaziland's first-ever female lawyer, but she also made history again, almost thirty years later, when she became the first woman in Swaziland to serve as a judge. With an illustrious, decades-long career under her belt, numerous leadership experiences, and a continued drive to further women's rights through her court decisions, Qinisile Mabuza deserves recognition for her positive influence on the legal field.

Mabuza first earned her Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland. She then went on to earn her Master of Laws, with an emphasis on Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure, from the University of South Africa. In 1978, Mabuza made history by becoming "the first Swazi woman to be admitted as an attorney of the High Court of Swaziland" (Commissioners, 2018). During her private sector career as an attorney, she was a founding partner at Q.M. Mabuza and Associates. She has also served as a university professor, working for three years at the University of Swaziland as a Lecturer of Law. Mabuza made history yet again in 2005 when she became the first woman ever appointed to serve as a Judge of the High Court of Swaziland. In 2016, she was appointed a judge to the court of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

Prior to being appointed as a judge on the national level, Mabuza also held positions on numerous committees, which all served as ample opportunities for her to provide needed female representation for other Swazi women. From 1994 to 1997, she worked as a Chairperson for the Swaziland Road Transportation Board. While Chairperson, Mabuza filled another important leadership role, serving as a Non-Executive Director for Swaziland's Central Bank. She fulfilled the latter role for eleven years, beginning in 1994 and continuing until her appointment to the High Court in 2005. In addition, Mabuza has served as a member of several Committees of Enquiry, including serving as Chairperson of the Phalala Fund Enquiry in 2005. It is very evident that Mabuza's legal expertise has helped her fulfill a wide array of professional roles, and she is a hardworking, positive role model for other Swazi women who wish to follow in her footsteps and pursue careers in the legal field.

Perhaps her most important leadership role to date is her appointment to the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). She was elected to the elite organization by a special vote conducted in January and February of 2013 and in 2018 was re-elected to her second five-year term with the organization. In this incredibly notable role, Mabuza works alongside 59 other commissioners from across the globe, led by the United Kingdom's Professor Sir Nigel Rodley. These legal experts "are known for their experience, knowledge and fundamental commitment to human rights," and it is refreshing to see an African woman actually being given a leadership position to advance human rights worldwide. In fact, Mabuza is one of only nine members within the entire Commission who hail from the continent of Africa, providing key representation for all of Swaziland on the international stage.



Qinisile Mabuza (eSwatini)

First Woman Lawyer and Judge (eSwatini)

By Cassidy Strong

Not stopping at simply providing valuable representation for Swazi women, Qinisile Mabuza has taken her role as a judge very seriously, using her platform to make key legal decisions that advance the rights of women throughout Swaziland. Most notably, one ruling in 2010 changed the long-established precedent and finally made it legal for Swazi women to own and administrate property in their own names. In this lawsuit, women's rights activist Doo Aphane took the national government itself to court, arguing that the Deeds Registry Act, specifically Section 16(3), effectively discriminated against her and all other women married in the community of property.

This particular Section "prevented women married in the community of property from registering immovable property in their names. This piece of legislation further allowed the husband to be the sole administrator of the property." Aphane asserted that this law violated both Section 20 of the Constitution, commonly known as the equality clause, as well as Section 28, which grants Swazi women equal rights across all political, social, and economic activities. Judge Mabuza's landmark ruling gave women married in community property the right to register property in their own names, as well as to have an equal partnership with their husbands in its administration. She also ordered Swaziland's parliament to implement reforms to the Deeds Registry Act, and openly criticized the government for not quickly ushering in these changes after the 2005 adoption of the Constitution.

Additionally, the International Commission of Jurists cited a specific human rights-related case in explaining their decision to approach Mabuza for membership. In this case, which revolved around a chieftaincy dispute with the daughter of King Sobhuza II, Judge Mabuza ruled in favor of the applicant. While numerous other judges flat-out refused to hear the case for fear of any repercussions that would ensue, she willingly took on the case, carved out the necessary time to listen to the Applicant's concerns, and eventually ruled in her favor. These examples showcase the unique leadership style, based on compassion and diplomacy rather than hierarchy and aggression that female political leaders bring to the table.



Qinisile Mabuza (eSwatini)

First Woman Lawyer and Judge (eSwatini)

By Cassidy Strong

Throughout her legal career, Mabuza has served as a pioneer for women's rights in both her home country of Swaziland and beyond. Mabuza consistently uses her platform as a judge to advocate for needed solutions to ongoing women's issues, and as a trailblazing member of a marginalized group herself, her work within this human rights context is especially admirable. Women in African countries, especially smaller nations like Swaziland, are often completely erased from the large-scale global discussion of feminist movements. Their ideas and political tools are often taken without any proper credit and reworked by their Western counterparts, who simultaneously deride African women for not being feminist enough. However, Mabuza's groundbreaking role as a lawyer, as well as her various landmark decisions as a judge on the High Court, serve as a telling example that African women are perfectly capable of bringing about positive policy changes, without any outside influences meddling in their affairs.

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Reine Adélaïde Alapini-Gansou (Benin)

Judge, International Criminal Court, The Hague

By Maame Efua Addadzi-Koom

Reine Adélaïde Sophie Alapini-Gansou is the first Beninese woman to serve on the bench of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Born in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire on 11 August 1956, she is the fourth of six siblings. She is married to Professor Magloire Grégoire Gansou, a Beninese Psychiatrist and member of the University of Medicine with whom she has four children. She is also the mother of 2 adoptive children. Alapini-Gansou started her primary education in 1963 in Libreville, Gabon, where her father worked as a surveyor. When her parents returned to Dahomey (Benin today), she attended the Catholic School of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Ouidah in 1968, where she completed her primary studies. She then continued her studies at the Catholic Cours Secondaire Sainte Jeanne d'Arc d'Abomey where she received her first-cycle diploma in 1974.

At her eldest sister's request, Alapini-Gansou proceeded to finish her secondary education at the Lycée Mathieu Bouké in Parakou, a popular school in northern Benin. There, she obtained her Baccalaureate in Literature in 1978. She completed her military service in 1981 whilst also studying law at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, National University of Benin. She defended her master's thesis in Business Law and Judicial Careers in 1983 at the same university. Judge Alapini-Gansou holds an advanced diploma in Environmental Law and Policy from the Universities of Maastricht (Netherlands), Bhutan, and Lomé (Togo). She also holds a Diploma in Common Law for business from the University of Lyon in France.

On 4 December 1986, Alapini-Gansou was admitted to the bar in Benin and has since been involved in issues relating to human rights. Through her work at the Women's Legal Aid Center of the WiILDAF network from 2000 to 2005, Alapini-Gansou provided legal and judicial assistance to many in various courts and tribunals in Benin. She was also a lawyer for the Association Avocats sans Frontières (ASF) (Association of Lawyers without Borders) as part of the "Justice for All in Rwanda" project in 2001. It was also in 2001 that her career in teaching and research began at the Faculty of Law and Political Science and the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Abomey-Calavi. She has authored several academic publications.

From 2005 to 2017, she was a Commissioner of the African Commission on the Human and Peoples' Rights. She served as the president of the Commission from 2009 to 2011. Her mandate as president, among other things, included chairing the joint group of special procedures of the United Nations and the African Commission.



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She served as a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa at three different periods in 2005, 2007 to 2012, and in 2017. As special rapporteur, Alapini-Gansou worked to strengthen the capacity of civil society actors and the synergy amongst human rights defenders in Africa. During her tenure, she introduced innovative tools such as the rapporteur's letter, communications procedure, and urgent appeals to the African Commission as measures for protecting human rights defenders. She has launched several studies and guidelines on topical issues including the rights of female defenders, freedom of association and human rights, and terrorism.

In 2012, she was appointed a member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration of the United Nations in The Hague. A year later, Alapini-Gansou established the Fondation défenseurs d'Afrique FDDA (Foundation Defenders of Africa) with the support of the African Human Rights Defenders' Network. Alapini-Gansou was inspired to create the foundation through her observation of the sufferings of, and lack of attention for human rights defenders. Consequently, the foundation offers services to human rights defenders who are at risk in Africa and the world. Her vision for the foundation is that it remains a crucible where human rights defenders will heal and receive strength to keep fighting for human rights.

Alapini-Gansou was a member of the United Nations International Commission of Inquiry on the post-election violence in Côte d'Ivoire from April to June 2011. She served as the head of the Human Rights Component of the International African Support Mission in Mali (MISMA) and for MISAHEL from 2013 to 2014. From 2016 to 2017, she was a member of the Mission of Inquiry on human rights violations in Burundi. Her work in these missions exposed her to the realities of the poor and other dimensions of human rights especially in conflict and post-conflict situations in Africa. During her mission as head of the human rights observers' component in Mali, she stated that 'political actors must at all times integrate into their debates the interests and rights of populations who remain the innocent victims of their conflicts and who pay the heavy price.'

In 2015, Alapini-Gansou was registered on the International Criminal Court's list of counsel until she was elected as a judge of the court in 2017 – a position she holds to date. Since 9 March 2018, when she was sworn into office, Alapini-Gansou has been serving as a judge in the Pre-Trial and Trial Chambers.



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As one who supports transparent and fair justice, she says, 'whenever it is a question of saying the law and dispensing justice, for me the bet is a little won; knowing that in matters of human rights and international criminal justice there is always something to be done as long as the wheel of history is turning'. Alapini-Gansou is mindful of the role of the ICC to intervene where States have been unable or unwilling to render justice to widows, orphans, and to populations in general who may be direct or collateral victims. While giving herself fully to her current position, Alapini-Gansou remains strongly attached to her origins and the African continent. She has traveled all over her home country, Benin to assist with projects on educating voters, combating violence against women and girls, training paralegals, and combating sexual harassment among others. She has also carried out fact-finding, protection, and promotion missions in human rights in more than 45 countries across the African continent.

Alapini-Gansou's commitment to her work has earned her certificates from around the world, including from the International Development Law Organization in Rome, Italy; International Criminal Justice Law; the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, the René Cassin Institute, to mention a few. She also has membership in several national and international organizations including the National Commission for Codification and Legislation in Benin, the International Criminal Bar, the International Association of Defence Lawyers, the Women Lawyers of Benin, the Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) and AFJB (Female Lawyers Association of Benin). She has acted in her capacity as an expert and consultant for the United Nations in particular UNAIDS and WHO on several occasions. She has also demonstrated leadership by anchoring the ABDD (Benin Association for Development Law) in human rights activities associated with HIV issues. As a result of her leadership, the ABDD has had several collaborations with international organizations such as UNAIDS, Plan International, and OCAL/ALCO. She handed over her leadership position with the ABDD in 2016.

Alapini-Gansou's efforts over the years have been recognized and honored. In 2010, she received the Human Rights Prize during the 15th anniversary of African Independence in Sorbonne, Paris, France. Again in 2012, she won the Human Rights Prize during the 25th anniversary of the African Commission on Rights and Peoples in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire.



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Judge, International Criminal Court, The Hague

By Maame Efua Addadzi-Koom

Alapini-Gansou's areas of expertise are in the areas of International Human Rights Law, Criminal Law and International Criminal Justice, Commercial Law and Development Law, Environmental Law, and Alternative Dispute Resolution. Based on her expertise in alternative dispute resolution, she worked for the creation of the Arbitration Centre of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Benin.

Her publications include:

- De l'article 64 à l'article 122-1 du code pénal : une reforme à mi-chemin ; Paru à la revue annuelle de l'assistance en santé mentale en Afrique « Réalités Africaines» 1999; [From Article 64 to Article 122-1 of the Penal Code: a midway reform; Published in the annual review of mental health assistance in Africa "African Realities" 1999].
- Aspects Psycho pathologique du viol en Afrique: Cas du BENIN et du CONGO [Psycho-pathological Aspects of Rape in Africa: Case of BENIN and CONGO].
- Le code des personnes et de la famille du Benin à l'épreuve de l'application. (2012) [Benin's Personal and Family Code put to the test of implementation].
- L'homicide au Benin 2015 [Homicide in Benin].
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Rose Nonyem Ukeje, OFR (Nigeria)

First Female Judge, Federal High Court of Nigeria

By Gift Okpara.

The Honourable Justice Rose Nonyem Ukeje, OFR, is a Nigerian lawyer and jurist. Born on the 5th of January 1943 to Christian parents in Zaria, Ukeje grew up in Kano state with her six siblings. Rose later married Airline Captain Elendu Ukeje (now deceased) and has four children and nine grandchildren.

Ukeje began her primary school education at the Ibo Union Primary School, Kano, and then proceeded to the famous Queen's School, Enugu in 1957 for her secondary education. Later, Ukeje would study at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1962-1966 for her first degree in law. Ukeje then attended the Nigerian Law School in Lagos in September 1967, but that course was truncated at the onset of the Nigeria/Biafra Civil War earlier that year. Ukeje returned to Nigeria Law School at the end of the Civil War, graduated, and was called to the Nigerian Bar on 24th June 1971. After the war, her husband obtained a job as a pilot in the Republic of Zambia, where Ukeje was also employed by the Ministry of Legal Affairs as an Assistant Legal Draftsman from 1972-1973.

In 1973, she returned to Nigeria and obtained a job in the Federal Ministry of Justice as an assistant Legal Draftsman. Her department has sole responsibility for the drafting of all Legislation for the Federal Government of Nigeria. She spent thirteen years in that Department drafting Federal Acts, Laws, and Decrees proposed yearly by the Federal Government. Specifically, as the Acting Head of the Department in 1979, her team of only three members drafted 103 Acts (the most important of which was the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979 – Act No 104 of 1979), the Bankruptcy Act (No 16 of 1979), and the Public Order Act 1979 (1979 No 5 – which prohibits the formation of quasi-military associations by any person or body).

In 1986, she was elevated to the Federal High Court as a Judge, pursuant to section 249 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. As a Judge of the Federal High Court, Justice Ukeje delivered acclaimed decisions on the Court's jurisdiction stated in section 251 of the 1999 Constitution. Justice Ukeje served as the Chairperson of an Expert Group to Review and Revitalise the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Women and Development, 1994-1995. In a case at the Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal, a female staff member was dismissed for "insubordination" before the end of her employment term. She insisted that her new boss who recommended her dismissal based the decision on racial discrimination and hatred for women, particularly women of color.



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Her earlier annual assessments showed she was a hardworking woman, even if she was not usually a “warm person”. After exhaustively considering the case, Justice Ukeje found the allegation not proved, and that the dismissal was not supported by evidence before the Tribunal. After a unanimous decision, the staff member was reinstated at her position and had her entitlements paid.

Justice Ukeje was also active at the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). After Nigeria signed the CEDAW treaty, Justice Ukeje was nominated to represent Nigeria at CEDAW’s Inaugural Committee. Soon after her membership, Nigeria’s initial periodic Report was due. CEDAW was new, and only a few people knew anything about it, so Ukeje single-handedly prepared and submitted Nigeria’s initial Periodic Report to CEDAW, which focused on the plight of the women and girls of Nigeria. The focus of CEDAW’s Annual Meetings is to consider and criticize Member Nation’s Reports.

Ukeje was known to actively participate in the discussions of Country Reports, and single-handedly prepared Nigeria’s Second Country Report. Due to her qualities of giving unbiased views of Country Reports, she was elected the Vice-President for the African Region for the 11th and 12th Sessions. She was also one of the representatives from three African countries to prepare the African Global Outlook on CEDAW and the regional group that produced a document well accepted by the CEDAW’s Committee of the Whole.

Her commitment increased awareness of CEDAW in Nigeria and several other women’s groups. While still a member of CEDAW, Ukeje joined other women’s groups and committees to encourage the Nigerian Government to adopt the “Affirmative Action to award 30% positions to women in all areas of life”. Even though Nigeria has still not domesticated the CEDAW treaty. Justice Ukeje (OFR) is also a member of the Body known as the Stakeholders’ Committee for the Reform of the Nigerian Judiciary. She was a member of each of the eight (8) Constitutional High Regulatory Judicial Bodies.



Rose Nonyem Ukeje, OFR (Nigeria)

First Female Judge, Federal High Court of Nigeria

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Justice Ukeje also holds a certificate of the Negotiation and Conflict Management Group (NCMG) – an organization for the Peace and Promotion of Alternative Dispute Resolution in Nigeria, awarded in 2005. Judge Ukeje has been a member of various women's Organisations and Committees and represented in Nigeria. Apart from professional and civil service activities listed above, during her period as Chief Judge, the Federal High Court was expanded to many other States in Nigeria, such as, in Adamawa, Owerri, Umuahia, Bayelsa, Kano and, the iconic Federal High Court Headquarters Building in Abuja was constructed from start to finish.

As Deputy Legal Draftsman of the Federation at the Federal Ministry of Justice, Judge Ukeje has represented and advocated for Nigerian women in various capacities. Justice Ukeje served as Nigeria's representative at the United Nations Committee on Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for two terms 1986-1990 and 1990-1994. She is the author of two highly acclaimed law books – The Nigerian Judicial Lexicon (2006) and the "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Aids to the Interpretation of the Constitution, Statutes and other Legal Instruments" (published in 2018).

Ukeje has been inducted into the Nigerian Women's Hall of Fame. She is also captured on page 565 of The Iconic Historical Book of Nigeria titled – "Nigeria 100: Lugard to Jonathan" – A Historical Perspective of the Formative Years of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1914-2014. Ukeje was appointed and remains a member of the National Peace Committee in Nigeria. Justice Ukeje has also been awarded the National Honour of the "Order of the Federal Republic (OFR).

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Solomy Balungi Bossa (Uganda)

Judge, International Criminal Court (Uganda)

By Michele Lynda Mugenyi

Justice Solomy Balungi Bossa is a Ugandan judge of the International Criminal Court (ICC). She was born on April 14, 1956 to Stanley Walusimbi Ssesanga and Florence Nanfuka Bayita in Nsamba, Kampala, Uganda. Bossa's father was a lawyer with a private legal practice while her mother tended to the home. She lived with both of them until the age of four when they separated and she was sent to live with her grandparents, Tito and Monica Walusimbi. She stayed with her grandparents in Ndejje, about 40 kilometers from Kampala, until she started secondary school. Bossa is a mother of four and was married to the late Joseph Fred Bossa, the former party president of the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC).

Bossa received most of her education within Uganda. Having grown up with a father who was an attorney and a paternal uncle who was a chief magistrate, the legal field was not a foreign concept to her, and she often credits her father for influencing her career goals. After completing Advanced Level Qualifications, she studied Law at Makerere University and received her Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) degree with honors in August 1979. A year later, she attended Uganda's Law Development Centre (LDC) to study for the bar examination and left with a Post-Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice. She was called to the bar in 1984.

Bossa began her career as a lecturer at the Law Development Center. After her father passed away in 1987, she became managing partner of his law firm while continuing to teach. Between 1988-1994, she was one of two women to own a law practice in the entire country at the time, with most women working in government, corporations, institutions, or even private practice, but not owning law firms.

The current Speaker of Parliament Rt. Hon. Rebecca Kadaga was the first woman lawyer to establish a law practice firm in Uganda. As a lawyer, Bossa advocated for human rights and offered pro bono services to clients of the Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA) and the Uganda Law Society Legal Aid Clinic. She represented indigent women in courts of law, often dealing with cases of rights to marital property, marriage dissolution, separation, inheritance, and child custody. She also practiced criminal law and represented indigent accused individuals and appellants before the High Court and Court of Appeal on charges including murder, rape, and defilement. Outside of the courtroom, she served as the founding president of the East African Law Society (EALS), Vice-Chairperson of the International Bar Association Human Rights Institute, and the first woman president of the Uganda Law Society (ULS) from 1993 to 1995.



Solomy Balungi Bossa (Uganda)

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She was also founding chairperson of the Kituo Cha Katiba, a good governance NGO that promoted constitutionalism, respect for human rights, and the rule of law. Throughout her legal career, Bossa kept a steady focus on the rights of marginalized groups. In this regard, she assisted in founding and leading the Uganda Network on Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS (UGANET), which advocates for the rights of those living with HIV.

Bossa joined the judiciary on the High Court bench in 1997 at the age of 41 years. She continued her activism through her judicial decision-making. For example, Bossa adopted a broad interpretation of spousal contributions to marital property while presiding over a divorce appeal. She declared that since women indirectly contributed to household expenses through housework, they deserved an equal share of matrimonial property after separation. This interpretation was later cited and adopted in a Supreme Court case over a decade later. Rulings like these were significant because they secured property for women and expanded women's rights in Uganda's jurisprudence.

Bossa's contribution to the establishment of the East African Law Society, and by extension leading lawyers as one of the civic groups to contribute to the revived East African Community. Her independent judgment and her consistent adherence to the rule of law earned her a nomination for the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) in Arusha, Tanzania – the first court she ever served on outside of Uganda. She was the first woman to join its bench after its inauguration in 2001, and she earned respect from her colleagues despite being the youngest of the inaugural bench of six judges. Earlier in her judicial career, Judge Arline Pacht, the then President of the International Association of Women Judges, encouraged her to offer herself for appointment as an international judge and arranged for her to train with other potential candidates for the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Budapest, Hungary.

She missed the chance to join the ICC at its inauguration, but her interest was aroused. While in Arusha attending a session of the East African Court of Justice, she met Justice Navanethem Pillay, a South African jurist, with whom she had trained in Budapest, and who was leaving her work as Judge at the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) to join the ICC.



Solomy Balungi Bossa (Uganda)

Judge, International Criminal Court (Uganda)

By Michele Lynda Mugenyi

Pillay encouraged Bossa to apply for a position of ad litem Judge at the ICTR and, after requesting support from the Uganda Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Justice, Bossa received the nomination. She was later elected as an ad litem judge by the UN General Assembly and was sworn in during August 2003. Bossa served at the ICTR for nine and half years before returning to the Ugandan High Court in 2013, where she served in the Land Division before being appointed to the Court of Appeal/Constitutional Court in the same year.

Before she departed from the ICTR, Bossa, like other judges who had served for long durations at the ICTR, was appointed to the United Nations Residual Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (MICT). Bossa's experience in international courts and her practice and advocacy in human rights as well as her participation in human rights-centered organizations assisted her to secure a nomination and ultimate election to the African Court of Human and People's Rights (ACtHPR) by the Assembly of the African Union (AU) in July 2014. At the ACtHPR, she cemented her knowledge and practice in the African human rights system and often handled judgments and cases that involved awarding reparations for injuries.

Overall, Bossa's forty-year career has been defined by her remarkable service to the legal fraternity, the voice that she has given to the marginalized, and her adamant respect for the rule of law. She proved that she was an impartial stickler for the rules in 2014 when she was one of five judges to annul Uganda's anti-gay law after it was passed without reaching the required quorum of a one-third parliament member vote. Despite the public backlash that she and her colleagues received, Bossa stood by the decision and justified her ruling with the law rather than bending to political or social pressure. In addition, she has proven that she can handle a wide array of cases, from divorce and child custody to criminal law and human rights.

These factors, along with her experience working in the second-highest court in Uganda, are some of the reasons why she was nominated for a position in the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2017. Her nomination for candidacy came during the 28th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in Addis Ababa. Candidates for the position had to display a high moral character, impartiality, integrity, and have the appropriate qualifications for the highest judicial office in their home country. These qualities and her experience ensured her election to the ICC by the Assembly of the State Parties in New York in December 2017.



Solomy Balungi Bossa (Uganda)

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By Michele Lynda Mugenyi

She took her oath of office in March 2018. She currently serves in the Appeals Chamber (AC) with four other judges. The quorum requirements dictate that she and her colleagues sit in every case that is filed in the AC. Outside of the courtroom, she continues to serve as a member of the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights, the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ), and as an honorary member of the International Commission of Jurists.

In short, Justice Bossa has built an extraordinary career for herself in private legal practice, as a judge in seven courts of different jurisdictions, and as a human rights activist. For her exceptional contributions to legal and judicial practice, she has received numerous awards including the Sudreau Global Justice Commitment to Justice Award in March 2018 at the Women in Leadership Conference held in Kampala and the esteemed Senior Counsel Award in April 2018 for her contributions to the Uganda Law Society as a former President.

With all of these accomplishments, it would almost be easy to assume that Bossa's success was effortless. Yet she has never insinuated that her road to success was a smooth one. In an interview with the New Vision's Carol Natukunda in 2018, Justice Bossa observed that women have to double their efforts to be welcomed into the same spaces as their male counterparts. Furthermore, once they make it into those spaces, women have to continue to work twice as hard, lest their colleagues should think that they are taking them for granted. This double standard is only one example of the struggles women face in the legal and judicial professions. Despite these challenges, Bossa's career is an example of how African women are capable of overcoming and taking up space at the local, national, and international levels. When asked what advice she had for young women, Bossa said that women should believe in themselves and keep trying in order to reach their full potential. At the end of the day, how far we go is only limited by how far we are willing to go.



Solomy Balungi Bossa (Uganda)

Judge, International Criminal Court (Uganda)

By Michele Lynda Mugenyi

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Sophia Ophelia Adinyira (Ghana)

Supreme Court Judge (Ret.)

By Christine Selikem Lassey

Justice Sophia Ophelia Adinyira is a retired Justice of the Supreme Court of Ghana. She was born on the 8th June of 1947 at Cape Coast in Ghana's Central Region. She is a deeply religious woman who is dedicated to her church, work, and family. She is married and has five children. In 1955, Adinyira started her education at Balobia Primary School in Navrongo in the Upper East Region of Ghana and proceeded to Asamankese Roman Catholic School in 1958. She obtained her Ordinary level certificate at the Fijai Secondary School in the Western Region of Ghana from 1961 to 1966. She then attended Wesley Girls' High School from 1966 to 1968 for her Advanced level certificate. After her high school education, she smoothly transitioned to the University of Ghana to pursue the LLB program in 1968 and the professional course at the Ghana School of Law. Adinyira was called to the Ghana Bar in 1973.

In 1974, she veered into public service at the Attorney General's department as an Assistant State Attorney until she was promoted to Principal State Attorney in 1986. Adinyira was appointed as a High Court Judge in 1989 and later promoted to the Court of Appeal in 1999. On the 15th of March 2006, Adinyira was appointed by the sitting President, John Agyekum Kuffuor, to the Supreme Court, where she served for thirteen years until her retirement. Adinyira has also served in diverse capacities in Ghana. She was the chairperson of the National Multisectoral Committee on Child Protection. Her exemplary leadership and admirable traits as a Judge earned her the reputable office of Chairperson of the Board of Judicial Training of Ghana's Judicial Service. She was also a member of the interview panel on the appointment of Magistrates and Circuit Court Judges of Ghana's Judicial Service. As a member of the General Legal Council of Ghana, she contributed her rich experience as a Judge to shape Ghana's legal education and profession.

Adinyira was a bulwark of child protection issues, juvenile justice, human rights, and human trafficking. This propelled her to collaborate with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, and UNICEF in drafting a juvenile justice policy for Ghana. Adinyira has also left her footprints in the international sphere by serving as a Judge of the United Nations Appeals Tribunal in New York and Geneva from June 2006 to July 2009. During her active years, she was also a member of the International Association of Women Judges. On the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ghana, Adinyira received an award from the Ministry of Women and Children to acknowledge her dedication to enhancing the Ghanaian child's destiny. She was a member of the Supreme Court panel that decided the famous 2013 election petition in Ghana.



Sophia Ophelia Adinyira (Ghana)

Supreme Court Judge (Ret.)

By Christine Selikem Lassey

She has fueled the wheels of democracy, the rule of law, and justice by her seasoned judgments in landmark cases over the years. Notably, in her valedictory judgment in Centre for Juvenile Delinquency v Ghana Revenue Authority, Adinyira declared that it was illegal to require persons to obtain a Tax Identification Number (TIN) before filing a case in court. This case reiterates the conviction of the Supreme Court to eliminate all bureaucratic procedures that impede access to justice.

Adinyira is an inspiration to women who did not think it was possible to excel in the profession, faith, and family life. She is an ardent member of the Anglican Church and held key positions at the national and international levels. They include Diocesan Chancellor of the Anglican Diocese of the Gambia, Moderator of the Staff and Nomination Committee of the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, and member of the World Council of Churches, Geneva. In 2019, Adinyira became the first female to be installed inlay Cathedral Canon of St. Peter in the Anglican Diocese of Koforidua in Ghana. Adinyira is a versatile woman who has excelled at the bench, bar, and church. Her inspiring achievement in public service is a classic example of patriotism.

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Stella Jane Marke (Nigeria)

First Woman Lawyer (Nigeria)

By Kelvin Osakpolor Onile

Stella Jane Marke (née Thomas), was born in 1906, to Nigerian businessman Peter Claudius Thomas and Jasetta Mary Thomas. Hers was a family of pioneers; her father was the first African to head the Lagos Chamber of Commerce. Her brother, Peter Thomas following in his father's footsteps of becoming a "first", would go on to become the first African pilot commissioned in the Royal Air force during the Second World War.

Following the completion of her elementary education, Stella traveled to the United Kingdom in 1926 to Study Law at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom. As a student at Oxford, she joined the West African Student Association (WASU), becoming an active member in the Union, thereby earning the title, Ogboni Agba – (esteemed elder), a distinguished form of recognition given by the union to outstanding members. Stella Marke became the first female to be bestowed that title by the union. In 1929, Stella was admitted into the Middle Temple Inn where she received her professional training up until her call to the English bar on the 10th of May 1933.

In October 1935, Stella Marke returned home to practice law, enrolling first at the Sierra Leonean Bar, and a month later, she returned to Nigeria where she was enrolled in November 1935. In Lagos, Stella set up her Law practice along Kakawa, Lagos Island. She worked on a wide range of legal matters ranging from criminal cases to family issues. Following seven successful years in legal practice, Stella was appointed as a magistrate in 1943, making her the first Nigerian woman to sit on the bench. She served in this capacity until her retirement in 1971.

Stella Jane Marke undoubtedly blazed the trail for Nigerian women lawyers, as the first in a long distinguished line. Through her tenacity and zeal, she demonstrated that women could bear the title Esquire (Esq.) in Nigeria – and West Africa, at a time when many thought it was not possible. Upon her call to the English Bar in 1933, making her the first woman lawyer in West Africa. The WASU celebrated her achievement with a printed announcement which read; "we are pleased to avail ourselves of the privilege to publish here, the first female Ogboni Agba, who recently passed her final Bar examination. Miss Thomas is to be the first lady Barrister in the whole of West Africa...."



Stella Jane Marke (Nigeria)

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Marke's activism is underlined by her historic participation in a 1934 lecture delivered by Dame Margery Perham. Stella, the only African woman to participate in this discussion held at the Royal Society of Arts, delivered what many consider to be her greatest speech to date. She challenged the notion that Africans should not be involved or consulted in the process of seeking to resolve the problem of Africa. She criticized Lord Lugard's dual mandate policy stating that it made puppets out of traditional rulers and chiefs. These words went on to gain traction among Nigerian Nationalists present at the event. Without a doubt, Stella's speech has contributed, in more ways than one to the Nationalists' struggle for the independence of Nigeria.

Stella's achievements paved the way for women in the legal profession. Following an active career in law, she dedicated her retirement days to civil rights advocacy, activism, and the rights of women until her death in 1974. Her life and legacy blazed the trail in which others follow today. Mrs. Stella Jane Marke is indeed a pioneer.

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Sylvia Tamale, Ph.D. (Uganda)

First Woman Law Dean

By Israel K. Tamale

Prof. Sylvia Tamale is an accomplished academic, author, and human rights activist. She was born in 1962 into a middle-class Ugandan family as the firstborn of five. She attended Budo Junior School, Kabinja (1969-1975) for elementary studies, and Gayaza High School (1976-1982) before joining the prestigious Makerere University in 1982 where she completed her Bachelor of Laws with honors.

In 1988, she completed a Masters of Law at Harvard University in the United States. A year later, Tamale received a Diploma in Legal Practice from the Law Development Center (Kampala) where she earned the Ugandan Law Society Prize for best performance in the Bar Course. She has been an Advocate of the Courts of Judicature in Uganda since 1991, and in 1993, she won a Fulbright-McArthur scholarship to pursue a Ph.D. in Sociology and Feminist Studies at the University of Minnesota. Her dissertation on the topic of female participation in Ugandan politics, entitled "When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender & Parliamentary Politics in Uganda," was published as a book in 1999, quickly gaining popularity throughout Africa, and projecting her public activism to a larger scale.

Following the completion of her doctorate, Prof. Tamale returned to Makerere University as a senior lecturer, and played a leading role in the introduction of a policy against sexual harassment at the university, setting a blueprint for other African universities to follow suit. Several years later, she headed a committee that launched an inquiry into claims of sexual harassment of students by university lecturers and called for strengthening the policy she helped introduce. Tamale's proposal to the Equal Opportunities Commission of Uganda that LGBTQ+ citizens be included in the term 'minorities' was met with severe backlash, with one of the leading newspapers in the country naming her the 'Worst Woman of the Year'—a title she embraced as a badge of honor in the battle for social justice. This is not the only time that her advocacy has been cast in a negative light, but she has never been discouraged by those who wish to tarnish her reputation.

Elected Dean of the Makerere University Law School in 2004, Tamale was not only the first female to hold that position at her alma mater, but in the whole country. As dean, she founded the Law, Gender and Sexuality Research Project.



Sylvia Tamale, Ph.D. (Uganda)

First Woman Law Dean

By Israel K. Tamale

In 2009, the Ugandan Parliament introduced the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, which among other things, proposed that a death penalty be imposed for any violators. Prof. Tamale played a defining role in questioning the validity of the bill and garnering international attention on the matter, and in steering the process that saw the repeal of the law by the Constitutional Court of Uganda.

In 2013, she was appointed to the rank of full professor and delivered her inaugural lecture (the universal right of passage for any recognized professor) on the 28th of October 2016 making history yet again as the first female professor in Makerere to achieve this feat. Entitled “Nudity, Protests and the Law in Uganda”, she presented on the topic of naked protests, delving into the history of such demonstrations in Africa, dissecting the institution of the law, and highlighting how women use their bodies as a way to effect change.

As a multidisciplinary scholar, Prof. Tamale is the author of many research studies, articles, and books, including *African Sexualities: A Reader*, a collection of texts differing in nature that serve to push forward a discussion about sexualities and their role in African society, past and present. In 2020 she published the instant classic: *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism*. Prof. Tamale has also won many awards in her lifetime of scholarship and activism, including the University of Minnesota Distinguished Leadership Award for Internationals in 2003, the Akina Mama wa Afrika Award for Human Rights Activism in Uganda in 2004, and the Inspirational African Feminists Award for being the first woman to hold the Dean of Law position at Makerere University in 2011, among others.

In addition to her responsibilities at Makerere University, she has been a visiting professor at many universities around the world and has served on several national and international boards, including the Uganda HIV/AIDS Alliance, the International Council on Human Rights Policy, and the Global Commission on HIV and the Law.

Prof. Tamale is undoubtedly a change maker, persistently fighting for those denied fair and equal treatment. Regardless of how she has been portrayed by some, it cannot be denied that she is a trailblazer and that she is not one to sit down and be silent about the critical issues of the day. She is an inspiration to the next generation of lawyers, feminists, and activists across the African continent.



Sylvia Tamale, Ph.D. (Uganda)

First Woman Law Dean

By Israel K. Tamale

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Therese Dejean (Central African Republic)

First Woman Magistrate

By Abou BA

Therese Dejean (née Yékawé) was born to Jean Wazoua and Henriette Moye in Mobaye, the Central African Republic, on 28 December 1946. Dejean is the first female magistrate in the Central African Republic. Therese Dejean married twice. Her first husband, Maurice Dejean, was a foreign affairs minister before becoming an ambassador in Israel. Patrick Arthur and François Bruno, their first two children were born in Israel. Their third child, Mauricette (Vicko), was born in Bangui. Maurice died as a victim of the Jean-Bedel Bokassa military putsch before Mauricette was born. Therese also has three additional children from her second marriage. Therese Dejean grew up in an environment hostile to the development of girls or women because of the prevalent politics and religion and social considerations. However, Therese had a destiny that would challenge the status quo, making her a pioneer.

When she was four years old, Therese went to Brazzaville with her aunt Louise. She was registered to attend a religious kindergarten that required the children to cut their hair. Therese's aunt could not accept it and, therefore, had her niece leave the kindergarten. She would then be registered in an establishment of Poto-Poto, where she was a distinguished student. In 1958, Therese registered in the school Ménagère des filles. She got her certificate the next year, which allowed her to join the secondary school of Bangui College des Jeunes Filles.

Between 1963 and 1965, Therese obtained her BEPC in Israel from the Lycée français de Tel-Aviv. Despite social difficulties, she passed a competitive examination of Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA) in 1967. Therese will then move towards extraordinary professional fulfillment. Starting in 1969, she started working as a prosecutor. In 1974, Therese started making strides towards a more distinguished career.

From 1974 to 1977, Therese Dejean was the public prosecutor of the Bangui High Court. She was also active in many associations. She was one of the founding members of the African Federation of Women Jurist in 1978. Therese was essential to the federation as she led the executive secretariat. She would attend all the congresses of the federation in many countries, adding her essential contributions to the development of jurist women. In 1992, Therese founded the Central African Republic Association of Women Jurist for the defense and protection of women working in law and led the Association until 1999. Furthermore, in 1994, she was one of the founding members of the Central African Union of Association of Women Jurist.



Therese Dejean (Central African Republic)

First Woman Magistrate

By Abou BA

Between 1977 and 1992, Therese Dejean served as the director of criminal affairs and pardon, the director of civil affairs of the Ministry of Justice, and the general director of legal services at the Ministry of Justice. She was also a jurist expert and a member of the National Commission for the Redaction of Personal and Family code. Additionally, she would work as an inspector of legal services at the Ministry of Justice. In 1996, Therese became a Constitutional Court advisor. She was continuously climbing the career ladder like a tree despite an unfavorable environment. Therese Dejean was internationally recognized. Between 1999 and 2003, she was the head of the Unity for Justice and the coordinator of the legal assistance program for the United Nations Mission for Human Rights in Burundi.

As a magistrate, Therese Dejean was motivated by principles like democracy, peace, women's development, and human rights. She would organize seminars African Republic to promote such principles. During the conflicts in CAR, Therese used her magistrate speak to speak out against these conflicts and advocated for the crucial roles women in the society could play in the restoration of peace.

She also fought discrimination against women so that women can contribute to the state institutions. Therese Dejean was a major proponent of the parity law in CAR, which she believed could be achieved through female literacy. She had defended it since the beginning of her magistrate career. In 2017, Therese declared these positions again in VOA Africa Radio. Remembering the difficulties that arose after the independence and the discrimination laws against women, she further stated that women should make efforts through education in order to reach parity.

The feats of this pioneer are far-reaching and exhaustive. It should be noted that during her magistrate career, she earned significant distinctions like being appointed as a Central African Knight, Officer, and Commander of the Order of Merit. However, her retirement would come as a result of a presidential decree.

Therese Dejean left behind a rich, unique and extraordinary career. She was a woman far ahead of her time and peers. If the judiciary were a kitchen, Therese would be the first cordon bleu cook in the Central African Republic. She is a woman the entire nation should be proud of.



Therese Dejean (Central African Republic)

First Woman Magistrate

By Abou BA

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Unity Dow (Botswana)

First Woman High Court Judge (Botswana)

By Lyric Burnett

On April 23rd, 1959, parents Moses and Ellen Diswai gave birth to their second child Unity Dow, in the rural city of Mochudi, Botswana. During this time, Botswana was an extremely patriarchal country under strict traditional values. Although Unity's life would soon result in progressive changes as she got older, it was common for countries at the time to heavily enforce a patriarchal system, due to the submissiveness in a woman's role. Despite the traditionalistic views of the country, Dow's parents did not succumb to these roles when it came to their parenting. Moses was a strong man who worked outside the home, while Ellen was a housewife who never assigned her children chores based on gender, which Unity states greatly shaped her as she never grew up thinking there was anything, she was unable to do because of her gender.

Unity Dow credits her childhood for inspiring her to want to challenge stereotypes placed on men and women all around the world. Outside of her parent's progressive parenting, Dow was born into a low-resourced country, where there were no tar roads or telephones. She did not see her first refrigerator until she was a teenager, and she had to hold water and firewood on her head. However, growing up in a technology absent country was not a detriment for Unity Dow. Instead, it influenced her to become extremely invested in books. According to her dad, Dow was an inquisitive child who loved reading. They would fetch water a great distance and Unity carried a book to read each time. Without even realizing it at the time, Dow's childhood life rooted her into becoming a renowned activist, author, lawyer, and the first female high court judge of Botswana.

Amidst poor living capabilities, Unity Dow found she was able to excel in school. When she began school, it was during a time where education still was not free. This forced her parents to pay for her schooling despite their low resources. Eventually, around 1971, diamonds were discovered in Botswana, mining began in 1972, and the country was beginning to see the results of this discovery. Dow's high achievements in school were not only acknowledged by her parents, but also by her teachers. In particular, Dow recognizes one of her teachers, Joan Backley, for being instrumental in pushing her to pursue a law career. Dow and her family knew very little about lawyers and had never seen or met one. Her teacher presented her with the suggestion to pursue this career path, which was met by her father's uncertainty of whether Backley was presenting a promising job.⁴ Despite hesitations, Dow decided to take her teacher's advice. After high school, Dow was awarded a scholarship to study law at the University of Botswana in Swaziland, a neighboring African country, in 1983. The scholarship also included leaving Africa for the first time and studying at the Edinburg University for two years as well.



Unity Dow (Botswana)

First Woman High Court Judge (Botswana)

By Lyric Burnett

Once going abroad and transferring to Edinburg University, Dow found herself one of the very few women enrolled. She exclaimed how at first, she felt like she was a part of an exclusive club, however, very quickly she began to realize the unfair gender inequality written within the law. Dow stated how when you start to practice you realize how just the language of the law is so male, the culture of the law is so male and you begin to think "I don't think it should be like this, I have a right to be here, and I've earned the right to be here and therefore this whole environment should be about me as well." This discovery catapulted Dow's relentlessness to excel as a female lawyer and tackle injustices in the system.

After her studies, Dow earned a job at the Attorney General's chambers in Botswana. Although this was a great job to possess coming out of law school, after only three years (1983-1986), Dow moved on to start her own law firm. As her career was progressing, so was her family life. Unity Dow, a Botswana citizen, married Peace Corps volunteer Peter Dow, a US citizen, and together they raised three children. One from a previous relationship, and two from this marriage. The complexities of Dow's family resulted in her challenging the Botswana government in a case that ultimately ignited her career and shot up her reputation. In 1982, the government passed the Citizenship Act, a new law preventing women like Unity, who were married to a non-Botswana, from passing on citizenship to their offspring. Dow challenged the law as discriminatory, alleging that the act renders her children aliens in their home country and land of birth. She voiced that this discriminatory treatment relegated women's legal status to that of their children and violated a provision of the constitution that states that every person in Botswana is entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms, regardless of race, place of origin, color, creed, or sex.

After five years and an excruciating amount of media coverage for not just Dow, but her family as well, she won the case on the basis of the law being discriminatory and degrading. In an extremely patriarchal country, this win spoke volumes for all women in Botswana. In 1997, after taking a couple of years away from the media, Unity Dow prepared to make history once again. The Chief Justice of Botswana offered her the opportunity to become the first female high court judge of Botswana. At the time, with the exception of two, the judges were male, and with the exception of two, the others were white. After taking some time to decide on whether to accept this opportunity, Dow agreed. As a judge, Dow was never afraid to take on the same government she was serving, she remained very progressive, ruling against the government when they were wrong, and creating the reputation of a judge who stood up for justice.



Unity Dow (Botswana)

First Woman High Court Judge (Botswana)

By Lyric Burnett

Unity Dow has made many contributions to the law. This was the case whether she was proving the Citizenship Act unconstitutional, ruling against the Botswana government in 2002 when the people of Kalahari took them to court, or even ruling in favor of the Basarwa people stating that they have the right to stay and hunt in their areas. As a judge, Dow worked rigorously on fixing human rights. However, she did not stop there. After serving as a judge for 11 years, Dow moved into politics where she vied for the Member of the Parliament seat in Mochudi District, but unfortunately, she lost. Yet, in 2014, Dow was officially elected as a Member of Parliament, appointed as Assistant Minister of Education, and has published five books.

After immense research, it is my finding that Unity Dow is a pioneer in her field because she never conformed to the injustices in her country. She did not allow sexist roles to influence how she learned and lived her life. Although she grew up in an underdeveloped patriarchal country, she discovered the complexities of life, she traveled, read, researched, and then expressed any heinous discriminatory acts, and fought hard to fix them. Before Unity Dow became the first female judge in Botswana, she had already made history with the Citizenship Act. Dow is a pioneer because she does not sit back and wait for someone else to handle matters; instead, if she noticed something not just, she has and continues to make it her sole responsibility to resolve it. That alone is admirable.

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Vera Chirwa (Malawi)

First Woman Lawyer (Malawi)

By Anyah Gilmore-Jones

In 1932, Vera Mlangazua Chirwa was born into the family of Theodore Kadeng'ende Chirwa Elizabeth Chiyambo. Following the customs of the Ngoni people, her status as the first child led her paternal grandparents to raise her. Yet, she was the daughter and first child of a medical officer. Chirwa's paternal and maternal grandfathers were both reverends. Even though both held the same occupation, Chirwa became especially close to her paternal grandfather. He began the legacy of leadership in the family by becoming the first African ordained as a reverend in Nyasaland. Though just a child, Chirwa was very cognizant of the injustices and discrimination within her community and she experienced this as a girl. Chirwa's parents stressed the importance of African women pursuing an education, which was the foundation of her career in activism.

In a time where "self-governing British colonies, forced their European intrusion and control, upon the people of Malawi, Chirwa found her truth, or 'Mlangazua', as her name states. Through her tireless efforts in fighting for the rights of her people while being a leader, lawyer, and human and civil rights activist, her actions confirm that she has been a pioneer in society for numerous reasons. However, her voyage to becoming literate was not easy by any means. She navigated and persevered through the HIV/AIDS epidemic, economic constraints within the country, poverty, child labor, and the expectation of her duty to fulfill her role in the household. After years of struggling for her education, Chirwa graduated at age 19 with education from schools in Livingstonia and Blantyre. Thirteen years later, in 1951, she met and married her husband, Orton Chirwa who was Malawi's Minister of Justice, a leader in the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), renowned lawyer, politician, and teacher. Together, they had three kids, though soon after Orton left Malawi to pursue his passion for law in England.

During her husband's absence, Chirwa found a job as a clerk to sustain her family. She then managed two roles on her own, mother and a clerk. Upon returning, Orton decided to open his law firm, the first in the country, which then made it possible for Chirwa to pursue her aspirations of becoming the first female lawyer in Malawi. When Orton returned, she journeyed to London to study for the Bar and become the first female lawyer in Malawi in 1966. Her first case was the prosecution of a Tanzanian state attorney.

Chirwa began creating her own more permanent efforts of activism to combat "democratic challenges, high levels of poverty, corruption, insecurity, and food shortages" by either creating an organization or joining one.



Vera Chirwa (Malawi)

First Woman Lawyer (Malawi)

By Anyah Gilmore-Jones

Her first act of service began in 1951 when she started the Nyasaland African Women League joining forces with women such as Rose Chibambo. The focus of the organization was to support the MCP's fight for an independent country and "gain separation from the unpopular Federation of Rhodesia & Nyasaland." Chirwa is also a founding member of the MCP, a party that represents the "Nyasaland African Congress" that was previously banned in 1959 and was critical to ensuring Malawi's independence in 1964. Later reflecting upon her barriers while pursuing her education, Chirwa founded the Malawi Centre for Advice, Research, and Education on Rights (Malawi CARER). This center helps tackle the challenges faced while the Malawi government tries to implement the policy of "Free Primary Education" for all of its citizens. Additionally, Chirwa also dedicates her time to working for "Women's Voice", a gender rights organization that supports and provides shelter homes for victimized women and children.

In 2004, Chirwa declared her candidacy for a coalition party, focusing on "continuing the fight for political rights" on a larger scale. Yet she has faced a backlash by the opposition stating she isn't an "established politician" or deeming her "too independent." In 2006, the Vera Chirwa Award was created by the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, South Africa. This award recognizes the alum of Master of Laws programs in Human Rights and Democratization at the University of Pretoria "who best epitomizes the true African human rights lawyer" and has "made an outstanding contribution to the protection and promotion of human rights in Africa." In 2007, Chirwa published "Fearless Fighter" which details her journey through "betrayal, imprisonment, torture, and exile;" yet it inspires "hope and extraordinary bravery."

Dauntlessly, Chirwa chose to defend her community without hesitation. However, her most notable sacrifice occurred when she put her life on the line and was sentenced to twelve years in prison for treason, facing death row. After Chirwa and her husband demanded a democratic form of government, Kumuzu Banda, the previous leader of the country, and the Malawi Congress Party declared the couple were enemies of Malawi.²⁸ Consequently, they were forced to leave Malawi, and the couple traveled to various countries including Zambia, Great Britain, and the United States. Whilst in exile, they faced rising charges of conspiracy against the government. On December 25th, 1981, they were captured in East Zambia by Malawi's security, forced to stand trial in traditional court, and faced criminal charges of treason.



Vera Chirwa (Malawi)

First Woman Lawyer (Malawi)

By Anyah Gilmore-Jones

While being tried for two months in traditional courts, they were not allowed defense attorneys, had their guilty verdict overruled by chiefs in the community, and were denied their right to be tried in Malawi's high courts. Behind bars, Chirwa's faith did not waiver. She endured disgusting food and faced torture, brutality, denial of visitors, and contact with her husband. Her faith prevailed when she was set for immediate release as sanctioned by Amnesty International in 1990. She was then allowed to see her husband again and "pardoned for humanitarian efforts" by Banda on January 24th, 1993. Her dream of a democratic form of government finally came true when Banda's presidential term ended shortly after.

Following her release from prison, Chirwa was appointed by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights as a Special Reporter on Prison Conditions in Africa. She is still an advocate for human rights and the welfare of the people. She has advocated for an end to the death penalty in Malawi. Chirwa was faced with the decision to sacrifice her interests for the interest of the greater good. She courageously made it through the unjust killing of Malawi citizens at the hands of British colonialism, Dr. Kamuza Banda's authoritarian regime, and the seemingly everlasting fight for the installation of a democratic form of government.

Through all the physical, socio-political, and socio-economic challenges Chirwa has faced, one could say she is a true survivor. Chirwa is more than a pioneer in law, but an impetus to lead women's rights, human rights, and political development in Malawi. Chirwa has set the standard for and created a legacy both in her own family and the country as a whole. One in which her daughter, Nyamazao Marjorie Mshana, has followed. Even at age 84, Chirwa still lives in her truth and won't stop her service until she sees equality in her country by continuing the fight for her people.

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Vera Duarte (Cape Verde)

First Woman Judge (Cape Verde)

By Britney Samuels

Vera Valentina Benrós de Melo Duarte Lobo de Pina also known as Vera Duarte is a human rights activist, poet, politician, and judge from Cape Verde. She was born on October 2, 1952, in São Vicente, an island in Cape Verde, located off the West African coast. In addition to becoming the first woman judge in Cape Verde, Vera Duarte was also the first woman to be appointed in 1993 as a Commissioner on the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Duarte spent the majority of her childhood in Mindelo, the port city of São Vicente. In 2012, a Cape Verdean magazine, *Nós Genti*, revealed that her father, a renowned Mindelo trader, had a fondness for music and played the guitar and piano. He, being musically inclined, influenced her to be the same, ensuring that her passion for the arts was sparked at a young age. Duarte grew up around famous people from various professions and walks of life. Her father frequently invited friends and musicians from all over the island to play guitar or piano with them at their home. Prominent amongst such guests were Chico Serra, Cesária Évora, and Celina Pereira. Duarte was also influenced by after-school music lessons she took at Dona Bibi and Dona Lili's piano school. As a teenager, she attended Gil Eanes High School which is the oldest secondary school in Cape Verde. Duarte would later travel to Portugal to study at the University of Lisbon.

Duarte was always aware of her passions even when she was young. As a child in fourth grade when she was asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, she responded that she would be a lawyer. Upon arriving at the University of Lisbon, in October 1970, she participated in student movements and contributed to social causes which adequately prepared her for championing similar causes later on in life. Duarte would go on to become not only a lifetime activist but also the first woman judge in Cape Verde. She received her law degree in 1976, one year before her country gained independence from the Portuguese. This was no easy task considering that before this accomplishment women in Cape Verde generally did not hold many high positions in courts. She would accomplish these feats during an era of frequent political and social change in the country. Political and ideological changes have had a significant influence on its literary life. Cape Verde did not become a peoples' republic, as did Angola and Mozambique. The Marxist-Leninist leanings of some politicians, militants, and engaged members of the intelligentsia did imbue the first phase of Cape Verdean independence with anti-colonialist cultural re-vindication, social protest, and revolutionary zeal. The political system, single-party governance, and single-party regimes put the brakes on literary creativity and productivity.



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Despite this, Duarte advocated for an emphasis on literature and literary creativity in her 1994 presentation titled "The Cape Verdean Writer Today" which was delivered at the First Gathering of Cape Verdean Writers. Considering how influential Portugal's colonial hold was on the country it is to no surprise that the majority of Duarte's work is centered on human rights, female empowerment, and the importance of literature. After returning from Lisbon she moved to Praia the capital of Cape Verde and began work as Counselor Judge of the Supreme Court of Justice, after being General Director at the Ministry of Justice and Public Prosecutor in the Cities of Praia and Mindelo. Duarte also joined and worked with numerous organizations dedicated to improving the lives of women such as Cape Verde's National Commission for Human Rights and Citizenship and as the first woman Commissioner and Chairperson of the African Commission on Humans and Peoples' Rights from 1987 to 1999. She was awarded the North-South Human Rights Award from the North-South Center of the Council of Europe in 1995 as well as the Medal of Cultural Merit in 2005 during the 30th Anniversary of the Independence of Cape Verde.

Some people believe that the majority of Duarte's long-lasting accomplishments came about during her time as Minister of Education although this could not be farther from the truth. Even before taking over the leadership of the Ministry of Education, Vera Duarte served as President of the National Commission on Human Rights and Citizenship. At that time, the Commission made a recommendation to the government for the Cape Verdean school curriculum to adopt the subject of Education for Citizenship, where all issues related to the civic education of students could be addressed. It was by luck, says Duarte, that the government accepted the recommendation and started the curriculum revision project. Duarte expressed it as 'immense joy and a privilege to have contributed something so significant to the formation of more aware, respectful and interventional citizens for the country's development.' Her work with the National Commission on Human Rights and Citizenship paved the way for the improvement in the curriculum of all Cape Verdean schools. Her actions brought a larger emphasis on civic education which in turn lead to more citizens with an advanced understanding of how their government works. Thus, creating generations of people who were knowledgeable about the on-goings of their country and were actively willing to make the necessary improvements. In an interview in 2008, Vera Duarte spoke about winning a literary competition as one of the defining moments that helped her decide she wanted to be a poet. Duarte asserted that the contest was the reason she received a beautiful letter of congratulations from Angolan writer Luandino Vieira who encouraged her to write.



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The Cape Verdean writers Luís Romano and Arnaldo França noticed her as well and actively encouraged her to continue writing. At the unfolding of Duarte's literary life, these three writers became her tutelar figures from the literary point of view. In 1981, she won the national poetry contest held by Cape Verde Women's Organization. In 1993, under the guidance of Arnaldo França, she published her first book of poems. Duarte utilized poetry as a means to communicate with people around her. She specifically made poems that other Cape Verdeans could relate to such as social issues and various types of love. She became one of the modern leading voices in Cape Verdean literature and poetry. This goes hand in hand with her philosophy that single-party regimes stifle literary creativity. For citizens of a country to be educated as well as passionate about the arts she has strong feelings they must be granted the freedom to do so. Duarte winning the competition solidified her position as a poet and gave her the confidence to continue writing as well as release her first book. Literature is just as important as other forms of activism because it can encompass and plant ideas of social change within the mind of an individual.

Duarte worked to change the minds of those around her in addition to improving the legal policies that impact the systems around them. She effectively helped to combat the numerous ways that people are oppressed within society. Vera Duarte spent the majority of her life participating in activism across various platforms. She dedicated a lot of time to trying to better her country and end the oppression that was affecting different communities and groups. She mainly focuses on the oppression perpetrated against women and communities without access to education. She has revolutionized many aspects of Cape Verdean society. Duarte was, and still is a pioneer in her multiple fields because she was often the first woman to enter certain spaces and enact changes in those spaces. She knew what changes needed to be made to improve the quality of life in Cape Verde. Duarte encouraged her fellow Cape Verdeans to not only fight for their rights but also to be creative while doing so. She equally channeled her energy between activism and poetry because she was aware that both could liberate people.

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Vida Akoto Bamfo (Ghana)

Supreme Court Judge (Ret.)

By Rahma Abdul-Rahman

Justice Vida Akoto Bamfo was born on February 7, 1949, in Pokuase, a suburb of the Greater Accra Region, to Mr. Alfred Kingsley Bannerman-Williams, a lawyer and one of the surviving pioneers of the Ghana School of Law, and Madam Grace Darkoa Dodoo. She is the first of many children, and her three siblings are also lawyers. She was married to the late Eugene Akoto-Bamfo, a Senior Legal Officer, with whom she had a son, who is also a lawyer. She is a Christian who identifies as a Methodist.

Akoto Bamfo had her early education at the Accra Royal School in Jamestown (British Accra). She obtained her Ordinary Level Certificate at Mfantsiman Girls' Secondary School in 1963, now Mfantsiman Girls' Senior High School, and obtained her sixth form education at Aburi Girls' Secondary School from 1967 to 1969, now Aburi Girls' Senior High School. Coming from a family of legal brains, she developed an interest in law after seeing a lady District Magistrate preside over a case when she accompanied her father to the Nsawam District Court in Accra. Her desire for the law drove her to pursue a legal education at the University of Ghana between 1972 and 1975. She obtained her qualifying law degree at the Ghana School of Law after taking off a year to have her child. Before joining the bench, she did her National Service at the Attorney General's office and worked with the British Indian Insurance Company. She subsequently served as the Manager in charge of claims at Zenith Assurance between 1976 and 1981.

Akoto Bamfo first joined the bench in 1981 as a Magistrate in the Accra New Town Magistrate Court. After two years, she was transferred to Cocoa Affairs as one of the first Magistrates at that court. She then rose to become a Circuit Court Judge but served only briefly and returned to Cocoa Affairs from 1986 to 1991. Akoto Bamfo became a Justice of the High Court in 1991 and served for three years, after which she went to the Gambia on secondment for two years. There, she served as the Chairperson of a three-member Assets Commission to probe the assets of the former president and some ministers of Sir Dauda Jawarah's government.

As Chairperson, her core values of fairness, integrity, impartiality, and judicial courage were put to the test. A member had leaked the Commission's report to the Executive before its formal release by the Commission. She was then told to make adverse findings against some Ministers. However, she stood her ground, even after she was warned that the report would be rejected.



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To Justice Vida Akoto Bamfo, integrity is key to the work of a judge. According to her, decisions must be made by sticking to the facts and the law. She also values respect and being firm without being rude. To her, being a judge was doing God's work, and when done properly, would merit God's protection.

On her return from the Gambia, she was elevated to the Court of Appeal in 1999 where she rose to become the presiding judge. She describes being a High Court judge as serving as a mistress of the court where you could help develop the law, while the Court of Appeal instead reviews procedures and decisions of the trial court. The peak of her career in the judiciary was in 2009 when she was elevated from the Court of Appeal to the Supreme Court. At the Supreme Court, she became one of the first Supreme Court judges to hear the first presidential election petition in Ghana. She adjudicated cases by regarding all cases and parties before her court as important and requiring the same level of attention. To Akoto Bamfo, parties must be accorded the same level of respect, and all the issues raised must be considered carefully. She believed that trivial matters did not end up in court and she was reluctant to crack jokes on the Bench.

Akoto Bamfo served in the judiciary for thirty-eight years. She worked her way from the District Magistrate Court in 1981 to the Supreme Court of Ghana where she retired in 2019, having gone through all the benches— from the District Court, the Circuit Court, the High Court, Appeal Court, and finally the Supreme Court. She is one of six women judges who make up the second and third generation of women to sit on the Supreme Court of Ghana.

Akoto Bamfo's love for fairness and transparency is also reflected in her desire to enhance democratic governance when she pushed for the passage of the Right to Information Bill into law. Her soft-spoken nature and dedication to the values of her job won her admiration from lawyers and other judges, both at home and abroad. In an ode by renowned lawyer Nkrabeah Effah-Dartey, he stated that "what every lawyer liked about [Akoto Bamfo] was her extreme tolerance of lawyers on their feet." Even the Chief Justice of the Gambia, who was part of those she had probed during her time on the Assets Commission, wrote to her thanking her for her courage when she worked in the Gambia and requested a copy of the original report. She advocated and exuded knowledge of the law and the requisite judicial temperament for a successful career on the bench.



Vida Akoto Bamfo (Ghana)

Supreme Court Judge (Ret.)

By Rahma Abdul-Rahman

Justice Vida Akoto Bamfo was the second female judge to grow from the lower courts to the Supreme Court. This growth not only shows how dedication and hard work is rewarded but also helps bridge the gender gap in the judiciary on the various levels of the courts in Ghana. Her success tells us how a woman's achievement in the judiciary encourages the next woman to join the legal field.

Through her growth from the lower courts to the Supreme Court, Justice Akoto Bamfo has accumulated a wealth of knowledge in law and its interpretation and has contributed to the development of the law through precedents. She stands as one of the female figures to look up to when considering the contributions of women in law. Although all her successes and achievements in the judiciary have not placed her as the "first" woman to achieve most of her accomplishments, her accomplishments and dedication to the judiciary are worth celebrating.

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Yolande Tano, Ph.D. (Côte D'Ivoire)

First Woman to Receive a Doctorate in Private Law

By Marie-Hortense Payette N'Takpe, Ph.D.

Born on July 17, 1953, in Grand-Bassam (Ivory Coast) to Alphonse Bouah Kamon (father and bailiff), and Thérèse Bouah Kamon (mother and schoolmistress), Yolande Tano married Neuw Abby Tano on February 17, 1979, and was blessed with three children, (Cédric, Laetitia and Olivia). Professor Yolande Tano (nee Bouah Kamon), is a retired Associate Professor, an expert in Private Law at the Félix Houphouët Boigny University of Abidjan, and a Senior Advisor in the Ministry of African Integration and the Ivorians of the Diaspora. She is the first female to receive a doctorate in private law in Côte d'Ivoire.

Professor Tano began her studies at the RAN Public Primary School, Abidjan, pursued secondary studies at the Lycée Sainte-Marie in Cocody-Abidjan, and completed her Advanced-Level exams in June 1971 with a specialization in philosophy and languages... She initially intended to study German but was forced to abandon her dream because at the time no cooperation, nor ties between Germany and Ivory Coast existed. Therefore, she followed the family tradition and opted for legal studies instead. Professor Tano subsequently enrolled at the Faculty of Law of the University of Cocody in Abidjan from 1971 to 1975 and obtained a master's degree in business law, and subsequently a Diploma of Advanced Studies in Private Law (DEA) in Rennes in 1977. Upon returning home, she became an Assistant Lecturer in private law at the University of Cocody in 1977. However, Professor Tano did not rest on her laurels. On the contrary, she aimed higher.

To achieve her dreams, she returned to France, to the Faculty of Law of Montpellier, where she obtained a first-class after defending her doctoral thesis in private law on the theme: "The protection of minors under Ivorian law" on June 30th, 1982. A boost in her career occurred when she passed the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur) (CAMES) -aggregation competition in Private Law with a distinction (Order of Merit n.1), becoming the second female tenured professor in private law in Côte d'Ivoire. She later trained to become a lawyer and was called to the bar in 2001. It is no doubt that with high-quality training and a remarkable skill set in the legal field, Professor Tano was admirably equipped to forge a stellar professional career.

Apart from being the first female Ivorian to hold a doctorate in private law, she held numerous high-level legal and administrative positions domestically and internationally.



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As an academic, Professor Tano taught courses in various disciplines in private law, maritime law, family law, contract law, labor law, and private judicial law. From 1989 to 1995, she held the positions of Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Law of Abidjan, President of the Department of Private Law, President of the Diplôme d'Études Approfondies (DEA) Programme in Private Law and the Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures Spécialisées (DESS) Programme in Business Law.

Professor Tano is also the first Ivorian female to sit on the Aggregation Committee for Private law. She was twice, in 1993 and 1995, a Member of the CAMES-Juridical and Political Sciences Aggregation Jury in both Cotonou and Lomé. From 1995 to 1996, Professor Tano became the Dean of the Faculty of Law of the University of Abidjan, elected by her peers to oversee the administrative and educational management of the Faculty.

Professor Tano was also appointed Vice-President of the University of Abobo-Adjamé, which specializes in Natural Sciences, Physical Sciences, and Environmental Management. Although this position has nothing to do with the law, Professor Tano performed well at the helm of this University, which also required the set up of a new training program and research structures as stipulated by the law on Higher Education and Research. She has held permanent membership of the French Institute of International Legal Experts since 2006.

Since her call to the bar in 2001, Professor Tano has not particularly practiced law. Before being called to the Bar, between 1986 to 1994, she worked as an associate consultant with a firm of lawyers, Kangah and Associates, and was then in charge of processing Business law files, which included drafting, decision-making, negotiating, and providing legal assistance.

Professor Tano effectively combined her legal and judicial professions with administrative functions. Her motivation was not that of financial allure but rather the desire to use her expertise for the benefit of her country. She was a member of the National Prospective Commission of Côte d'Ivoire 2025 and Rapporteur of the Office of the said Commission from 1993 to 1995; Technical Advisor to the Ministry in charge of institutional relations and member of the jury of the Research Prize at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research between 1994 and 1999. She also chaired the Legal and Economic Sciences Committee from 1995 to 2016.



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In 2011, Professor Tano was appointed Deputy Director of the Cabinet at the Ministry of African Integration and Ivorians of the Diaspora; she held the position until 2016. In the same year, her expertise was further recognized as she was appointed as part of the Committee of experts in charge of the revision of the Ivorian Constitution. She was one of three women out of ten experts appointed by the President of the Republic.).

Professor Tano has also used her expertise at an international level. She has very often been part of Ivorian delegations to the United Nations General Assembly. In this capacity, Professor Tano participated in the development of the International Criminal Court. In addition, in her personal capacity, Professor Tano was the representative of Côte d'Ivoire as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. She traveled to Canada and the United States, where she conducted a comparative study of the legal systems of the aforementioned countries. She focused on the common law and the American judicial system, encountered several attorneys, and visited various prisons in different states.

In 1985, she was an Associate Consultant on the condition of women and children in Côte d'Ivoire with several organizations, including UNICEF, UNDP, and the World Bank. This engagement continued with her cooptation from 1998 to 2001 in the International Bioethics Committee of UNESCO in which she was the Rapporteur for the bureau of the Committee responsible for the Human Genome Project, using embryonic stem cells and cloning in the medical field.

Her international career was brought into the limelight by her appointment in 2001 as Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire to UNESCO-Paris. In this capacity, she worked to raise funding for regional projects for the improvement of the status of women, gender issues, the launch of cultural industries, amongst others. In 2007, she became a Senior Human Rights Consultant at the United Nations Office for West and Central Africa in Dakar. For a year, she offered her consultancy services on issues of human rights violations, insecurity in the ECOWAS region, and also on other matters of transitional justice. With UNAIDS, Professor Tano shared her expertise on laws on HIV / AIDS, gender, and human rights in Dakar, Yaoundé, and Bamako, from 2010 to 2012. However, these high positions did not take Professor Tano away from her first love and passion for scientific research. She has to her credit, numerous doctoral theses in Africa as well as in France, and also prepared many candidates for the CAMES teachers and researchers' aggregation competition.



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Her writings include; the Legal incompetency of the Illiterate (1985), Monogamy, or Polygamy: a Difficult Social Choice? (1986); The Law for What? Inaugural Lesson (1986); The Precariousness of Land Title Deeds under Ivorian Law (1991); Legal Encyclopedia Africa/ AfricanLaw (Ivorian Law) Edition Bordas Dunod Gauthier - Villars (1992-1993); Medical Liability in Private Institutions (1995); Ethics and Careers of Teachers in Institutions of Higher Learning (1997) and many other writings produced in the course of her numerous consultations.

Looking back on her career path, one can only be proud of Professor Yolande Tano! Her dedication to hard work has earned her honor and recognition of the State of Côte d'Ivoire and international organizations, as evidenced by her numerous awards. Thus, she was made Officer of the Order of Merit of National Education of Côte d'Ivoire in November 1999, Officer of the National Order of Côte d'Ivoire in August 2002, Knight of the National Order Côte d'Ivoire in August 2006, and Commander of the National Order of Côte d'Ivoire in January 2013, and again in 2017. Additionally, Professor Tano was awarded the Diploma of Honor by the Permanent Delegate of UNESCO for her active participation in various committees and the work of UNESCO, including the Executive Council, the General Conference, the subsidiary bodies, and the African Group.

Although retired, the distinguished Professor continues to support scientific research by supervising doctoral dissertations and master's theses. Her expertise is still sought after by many private universities in Abidjan to lead as an educational executive or member of a scientific committee. Despite all her achievements, Professor Yolande Tano does not intend to rest on her laurels but plans to take on new challenges. The life and career of Professor Yolande Evelyn Marie-Therese Tano is a distinguished one with footprints of professional accomplishments. Her life has been rather inspiring, especially for the women whom she encouraged to have confidence and believe in their abilities.

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Yvonne Mokgoro (South Africa)

Judge (Rtd), Constitutional Court, South Africa.

By Jordan Orange

Justice Yvonne Mokgoro was born on October 19, 1950, in Galeshewe Township near Kimberley in the Northern Cape. She was born during apartheid and she actively fought against this system of discrimination and oppression. . She overcame many obstacles to embark on a robust legal career. Mokgoro's educational background is extensive and a testament to her expertise in the legal field. Upon graduating from St. Boniface High School, she attended the University of Bophuthatswana, now known as North-West University, as a part-time student. Mokgoro received a Bachelor of Jurisprudence from North-West University and then two years later she obtained a Bachelor of Laws. In 1987, Mokgoro earned a Master of Laws. Three years later in 1990, she received another LLM from the University of Pennsylvania. Ultimately, Mokgoro's extensive educational background prepared her for her influential career in law.

The beginning of Mokgoro's career in law was not the typical experience one would expect. Her first two jobs were a nursing assistant role and a retail salesperson position. Mokgoro began her career as a public servant when she was appointed as a clerk for the Department of Justice. After she earned her LLB degree in 1982, she was appointed as a maintenance officer and public prosecutor in the Mmabatho Magistrate's Court. After fighting for justice for people in the public sector, she embarked on a new path that brought her back to education. In 1984, she was appointed as a law lecturer in the Department of Jurisprudence at the University of Bophuthatswana. Her dedication to this role allowed her to rise through the ranks, leading her to become an associate professor. She served in that position from 1984-1991 and between 1992 and 1993, she transitioned to associate professor at the University of Western Cape.

While working as a professor, she also served as a specialist human rights researcher for the Centre for Constitutional Analysis at the Human Research Council. In addition to her other commitments, she lectured part-time at the University of Pretoria. Courses she taught during her academic career include; Constitutional Law, Comparative Law, Criminal Law, Private Law, and Human Rights Law Jurisprudence at several universities in South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. She has also written and presented many scholarly papers while participating in national and international conferences. Mokgoro's studies focused on the impact of South African laws on women and children in the country and on the international stage. Her success in academia led to her appointment as a judge of the Constitutional Court of South Africa in October 1994, where she served until 2009.



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The Constitutional Court was created after the country's first democratic constitution in 1994. In this position, she helped ensure that the new democratic laws of the land were being upheld. During her term, she served as chairperson of Venda University Council from 2002 to 2009 and as chairperson of the Selection Committee of the Press Council of South Africa.

Mokgoro is an honorary Professor of Law at the University of South Africa, University of Pennsylvania, University of the Western Cape, University of Cape Town, University of Pretoria, and the University of South Africa. She was granted a Doctor of Laws from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the University of Toledo, the University of Northwest, the University of the Western Cape, the University of Pretoria, and the University of the Witwatersrand. She has received numerous awards such as the Human Rights Award by the Black Lawyers Association in 1995, the Oude Molen Reserve Order of Merit in 1995, and the Legal Profession's Woman Achiever Award by the Centre for Human Rights in 2001. After her term on the Constitutional Court, she was appointed to serve as Special Ambassador for the University of Venda. Mokgoro was selected by the President of South Africa as an official Advocate for Social Cohesion in South Africa from 2013 to 2018. Her remarkable career is proof of her dedication to the legal field and the human rights of South Africans.

Mokgoro has made numerous contributions to the field of law. As a South African woman, becoming a lawyer and then a judge on the Constitutional Court of South Africa alone was a major contribution to the symbolic representation of women in the legal profession. She showed that despite being part of a racial group in a country that had laws to enforce her inferiority, she was still able to become an influential figure within her country and abroad. She has stood up against violence and human rights violations, and through her positions, she has ensured that democratic ideals were upheld. She has been awarded for her outstanding work and contributions to the law and served as a resource for non-governmental and community-based organizations.

South African and international human rights initiatives were improved as a result of Mokgoro's involvement in this field. She became the president of Africa Legal Aid, providing legal assistance and human rights education throughout Africa. She served on many boards that ensured the safety of children and women like the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund and the South African Police Services Education Trust.



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Mokgoro expanded women's rights and held membership in the International Association of Women Judges. In 2006, she was chosen to be an icon of the history of Women Lawyers in South Africa. This recognition alone is indicative of how influential she was to South Africa's legal field and around the world. Yvonne Mokgoro is a pioneer for all Black women within the field of law because she has dedicated her life to ensuring that the law is just and fair.

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