



Pioneer African Women in Law

A Digital Archive Series (Vol. 3)



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WHY PAWLIP?

The Pioneer African Women in Law Project (PAWLIP) 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



Julia Sebutinde (Uganda)

Judge, International Court of Justice (Uganda)

By Jordan Orange

Julia Sebutinde was born on February 28, 1954, in the Kiwafu Village, Entebbe, Uganda. Sebutinde's mother was a civil servant and a housewife. Sebutinde came from a modest family, one without a wealthy background, and many people see this as a greater indicator of how hard she has worked throughout her life. Her parents worked hard and sacrificed so that their children could attend the best schools in Uganda. She was born into a period where Uganda was actively fighting for independence from the British colonial office.

Uganda became independent in October of 1962 and proceeded to join the commonwealth when Sebutinde was eight years old. The country's economy was built on the backs of the African people in Uganda. They created economic booms for the British empire through their production of products like cotton. Uganda after independence had to rebuild its economy and create new streams of revenue as a newly independent country. Growing up within this very tumultuous time proved how resilient both Sebutinde and her family were. Even in the face of a shift of power and destruction of life as they previously knew it, her parents were still able to make sure that they were preparing their kids to break through the barriers that colonization created for black people. She also grew up within the authoritarian regime of Idi Amin Dada that began in 1971. Having lived through this period of Ugandan turmoil, it is clear why Julia Sebutinde has led a career that has been dedicated to fighting for justice.

Julia Sebutinde attended Lake Victoria Primary School in Entebbe, Uganda, throughout the 1960s. After finishing primary school, she went to Gayaza High School. Sebutinde pursued her degree at Makerere University and received a Bachelor of Laws Degree in 1977. While she was still an undergraduate law student at Makerere University, she was chosen as a Ugandan delegate at the United Nations Decade for Women in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1975. This moment opened her eyes and inspired her. She was able to see driven women from all over the world strategically addressing the issue of gender inequality.⁴ She had no clue that her career would lead her to be one of the influential female voices that called for change involving gender inequality and discrimination. Sebutinde says that pursuing a career in law was not something that she had planned to do but decided to do so, based on encouragement from her associates. She then pushed herself to concentrate on law studies and realized that she enjoyed it. Not long after obtaining her undergraduate degree, she gained a post-Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice from the Law Development Centre in Uganda.



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While pursuing her education, the country remained under the control of Idi Amin's dictatorship. Sebutinde then traveled to Scotland to obtain her Master of Laws Degree with Distinction from the University of Edinburgh in 1990. The University of Edinburgh also awarded her with a Doctorate of Laws for her outstanding work in legal and judicial service in 2009. Sebutinde received countless post-graduate certificates and diplomas in many different areas. Some of them were legal practice, legislative drafting, and leadership skills. Being a woman receiving an education at this time was extremely difficult, but once again, she persevered and has continued her education throughout her life.

After Sebutinde graduated from Edinburgh in 1991, she worked in the UK for the Ministry of Commonwealth, and not long after that, she joined the Ministry of Justice in the Republic of Namibia. She worked on a lot of individual committees where she drafted multiple treaties. These treaties established the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development. Both of these groups made a lot of impact throughout the continent. Sebutinde gained skills by way of drafting and interpreting laws, using legal instruments, and improving her listening.

In 1996, Sebutinde was appointed as one of the judges of the High Court of Uganda. She did many important things within this position. In her work on the Commissions of Inquiry, Judge Sebutinde investigated general and specific allegations of corruption and mismanagement in the Ugandan Police Force, the circumstances pertaining to the procurement by the Ministry of Defense of four MI-24 combat helicopters in 1997, valued at US\$12.9 million, and over 500 allegations of corruption and mismanagement in the Uganda Revenue Authority. She was able to do substantive work and she made sure to have a fundamental role in being transparent with the people of Uganda. She made sure the local newspaper gave daily accounts of events so that the public would know what was happening. Sebutinde held people accountable and faced corruption head-on.

Julia Sebutinde also served as a judge on the Special Court of Sierra Leone between the years 2005 and 2011. The Special Court for Sierra Leone was created in 2002 by the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone to prosecute people who had violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the laws of Sierra Leone.



Julia Sebutinde (Uganda)

Judge, International Court of Justice (Uganda)

By Jordan Orange

In 2012, Sebutinde became the first African woman to be appointed to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), also known as the world court. She has broken barriers and paved the way for countless other African women in the field of law.

Sebutinde has stood up against violence and acts of terror, whether it was against Charles Taylor, the former President of Liberia, or fighting for the courts to give reparations to the victims of violence in Sierra Leone. As Grossman (2018) notes, “given the Court’s inability to pay any kind of reparations to victims, Judge Sebutinde incisively questioned the impact of the Special Court on victims of the conflict and the goals of international justice.”

Sebutinde made sure to stand up for individuals all over the continent, fighting to ensure that people would better understand the humanitarian needs in parts of the world outside of Europe. In 2001 Julia Sebutinde was given a Special Award by the Ugandan Law Society in recognition of her work towards justice in Uganda. She also received the “Good Samaritan Award” at the Congress of Advocates International in 2004. She continued to make sure that she gave back whether it be through her membership in the National Association of Women Judges of Uganda from 1996–2011, or the International Association of Women Judges. She participated with these organizations to give back and continue to encourage and support women within the field of law. She also became a chairperson on the Board of Directors of the Acid Survivors Foundation in Uganda, even after becoming a judge.

She continued to serve women and the people of Uganda even when serving on an international platform. Sebutinde also spent her career continuously fighting for women and children, due to her unique perspective of being a woman and mother. These are just a few of the causes, boards, and positions she has championed and served throughout her lifetime. Julia Sebutinde has been a pioneer and trailblazer within the field of law for black women all over the world, specifically within Africa. She is the first African woman to be appointed to the ICJ, and through her efforts, broken many barriers and she definitely won’t be the last. Sebutinde has made numerous contributions to the field of law. By being the first African woman to serve on the ICJ, she has made a change to international law and the symbolic representation of women. She has contributed immensely to international law jurisprudence through the cases she has heard, often with dissenting opinions.



Julia Sebutinde (Uganda)

Judge, International Court of Justice (Uganda)

By Jordan Orange

***Some of the cases decided by Sebutinde, as alluded to by Grossman, 2018, 54) include: Obligations concerning Negotiations relating to Cessation of the Nuclear Arms Race and to Nuclear Disarmament (Marsh. Is. v. India), Judgment, (Oct. 5, 2016); Obligations concerning Negotiations relating to Cessation of the Nuclear Arms Race and Nuclear Disarmament (Marsh. Is. v. Pak.), Judgment, (Oct. 5, 2016); Immunities and Criminal Proceedings (Eq. Guinea v. Fr.), Order, (July 1, 2016); Alleged Violations of Sovereign Rights and Maritime Spaces in the Caribbean Sea (Nicar. v. Colom.), Judgment, (Mar. 17, 2016); Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Dem. Rep. Congo v. Uganda), Judgment, 2015 I.C.J. 168 (Dec. 19); Certain Activities Carried Out by Nicaragua in Border Area (Costa Rica v. Nicar.), Judgment, (Dec. 16, 2015); Construction of a Road in Costa Rica Along San Juan River (Nicar. v. Costa Rica), Judgment, (Dec. 16, 2015); Obligation to Negotiate Access to the Pacific Ocean (Bol. v. Chile), Judgment, (Sept. 24, 2015); Questions Relating to Seizure and Detention of Certain Documents and Data (Timor-Leste v. Austl.), Order, (June 11, 2015); Application of Convention on Prevention and Punishment of Crime of Genocide (Croat. v. Serb.), Judgment, (Feb. 3, 2015); Whaling in Antarctic (Austl. v. Japan: N.Z. intervening), Judgment, 2014 I.C.J. 226 (Mar. 31); Maritime Dispute (Peru v. Chile), Judgment, 2014 I.C.J. Rep. 3 (Jan. 27); Request for Interpretation of Judgment of 15 June 1962 in Case Concerning Temple of Preah Vihear (Cambodia v. Thai.), Judgment, 2013 I.C.J. Rep. 281 (Nov. 11); Frontier Dispute (Burk. Faso v. Niger), Judgment, 2013 I.C.J. Rep. 44 (Apr. 16); Territorial and Maritime Dispute (Nicar. v. Colom.), Judgment, 2012 I.C.J. Rep. 624 (Nov. 19); Questions Relating to Obligation to Prosecute or Extradite (Belg. v. Sen.), Judgment, 2012 I.C.J. Rep. 422 (Jul. 12). Obligations concerning Negotiations relating to Cessation of the Nuclear Arms Race and to Nuclear Disarmament (Marsh. Is. v. India), Judgment, ¶ 13 (Oct. 5, 2016) (separate opinion by Sebutinde, J.) (“In my view, the evidence on record when properly tested against the criteria well-established in the Court’s jurisprudence shows that a dispute did exist, albeit in a nascent form, between the Parties before the filing of the Application and that this dispute crystallized during the proceedings. I particularly disagree with the new criterion of ‘awareness’ that the majority introduces, as well as the formalistic and inflexible approach taken in the determination of whether or not a dispute exists.”); Maritime Dispute (Peru v. Chile), 2014 I.C.J. Rep. 3, 116, ¶ 6 (Jan. 27) (dissenting opinion by Sebutinde, J.) (“In my view, the above analysis of the evidence before the Court and conclusion thereon, fall short of the stringent and well-established standard of proof which the Court itself has set for establishing a permanent maritime boundary in international law on the basis of a tacit agreement.”).



Julia Sebutinde (Uganda)

Judge, International Court of Justice (Uganda)

By Jordan Orange

Application of Convention on Prevention and Punishment of Crime of Genocide (Croat. v. Serb.), Judgment, ¶ 2 (Feb. 3, 2015) (separate opinion by Sebutinde, J.) (“It is my considered opinion that, in the present Judgment, the inference that the Court draws from the absence of charges of genocide in certain ICTY indictments relating to the conflict in Croatia, without the Court having established the underlying reasons therefor, is highly speculative and can lead to undesirable conclusions.”).

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Kalthoum MEZIOU DOURAÏ (Tunisia)

First Woman Dean of Law in Tunisia

By Bouthaina Jhimi & Rym Ben Salah

Dr. Kalthoum Meziou Douraï is a Tunisian lawyer and the country's first woman Dean of Law. She was born on the 15th of September 1946 in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia. She lost her mother at two years old, while her older brothers were only five and three. Since her father did not remarry, and it was up to her grandmother to raise her and her siblings. Now, Douraï is married with 3 children and 6 grandchildren.

Kalthoum Douraï's schooling began at the age of four when she started kindergarten at Notre Dame de Sion School. She graduated high school and obtained her baccalaureate degree in 1964. Highly inspired by her father, Ahmed Dorraï, a lawyer and a judge, Kalthoum chose to pursue a career in law. Dr. Meziou attests to the significant role her father played in her life, as he was a dear friend to Tahar El Haddad, a famous Tunisian author, scholar, and activist. Her father transmitted his feminist, innovative and daring approach to her before they were expressed in his book "The Complete Works ", published By Beit Elhikma in 2019.

Following in her father's footsteps, she started her higher education in the faculty of law and economic Sciences of Tunis (University of Tunis), where she earned her Bachelor of Law degree in 1968. Dr. Meziou would obtain not only a Graduate Diploma in Private Law in 1970 but a Graduate Diploma in Criminal Sciences only two years later. These feats prove her strong will and determination, especially knowing that she achieved them while married with children.

Meziou's professional career started as an Assistant Professor in the same faculty she graduated from. This new position did not slow down her academic growth as she completed her Ph.D. in "Relations in Private International Family Law between the Tunisian and the French systems" in 1982. Dr. Meziou has proven to remain an extraordinary asset to the field. Her strong work ethic and professionalism made her an exceptional lawyer. For decades, Dr. Meziou continued to share and publish her research and studies of national and international law. All without sparing any effort empowering and motivating the future generations.

Since the early eighties, she has been engaged in the "Community of Law." She wrote two books in French about the issues of drug offenses in her work "Les infractions en matière de stupéfiants, C.E.R.P. 1979" and wrote about International Private Law in "Les relations en droit international privé entre les systèmes tunisiens et français: Le cas du divorce des couples mixtes, Thèse d'Etat, Tunis, 1982."



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Meziou also published many articles, most of them reflected her feminism and engagement against discrimination and inequality such as "Féminisme et Islam dans la réforme du Code du statut personnel du 18 février 1981" an article about feminism and Islam in the reform of the Personal Status Code. She also wrote about women in corporate spaces with "Le travail des femmes dans l'entreprise. Ethique et pratique, Perspectives Maghrébines "

With an unbeatable level of engagement, Dr. Meziou was involved in many projects and aspects of research; she was a member of different reform commissions, from the Reform Commission of the Tunisian Personal Status Code of 1981/1993 to the Preparation Committee for the Code of Private International Law of 1998, where she remains an added-value to her nation. Besides researching and writing about numerous legal matters, Dr. Meziou became Head of the Department of Private Law and Criminal Sciences at the Faculty of Legal Sciences (University of Tunis 2) from 1991 to 1996. Three years later she became head of the Faculty where she served until 2002.

Certainly, being the first woman Dean of Law in Tunisia is no easy task. It is a prestigious position that requires genuine know-how, great dedication, and specific skills to not only acquire the position but to be effective and innovative while leading. The Deanship was not just a title, but a complex job where she had to ensure and supervise the work and courses of the administration of the Ministry of Higher Education and other ministries that interfered occasionally. It was a very rich networking opportunity where she met colleagues from all over the country and the globe, allowing her to gain insight into new experiences, knowledge, and various points of view.

The establishment of the Master's degree of Common Law, the first and only one in all the Tunisian Law School is the achievement she's most proud of. Providing the best possible teaching staff, installing a special library that provides access to legal textbooks, law journals, and periodicals, and creating an enabling environment for the students was not easy, especially with very limited means.

Aside from that, the achievements of Dr. Meziou go even beyond creating new masters' degrees programs and enriching legal studies. She helped pave the way for future female lawyers to prove themselves. She empowered young girls aspiring to innovate and create change.



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The role model that Dr. Meziou became contributed to the establishment of a gender-diverse environment that helped install the culture supporting equal opportunity and treatment within the Tunisian university systems. Being the Dean of one of the most reputable law faculties in the country did not detract her from reality, as she managed to maintain her involvement in civil society. She became a member of the Tunisian Economic and Social Council from 1999 to 2003, continued her academic contributions that solidified her participation in the inaugural conference of the UNESCO Chair, Women and Change Crédif with “Femmes et changement, le Code du statut personnel et ses réaménagements: une stratégie du changement par des réformes juridiques” and “La communauté des biens entre époux”, De la modernité par le droit”

Dr. Meziou dedicated her life to her community and being the first woman Dean of Law School in Tunisia didn't change that. On the contrary, enhanced it. After her experience as a Dean was over, Dr. Meziou insisted to continue on the same path. She wrote her third book in 2007 in collaboration with Mr. Ali Mezghani (Professor of International Private Law at the University of Tunis 2) about Equality of Inheritance between men and women. “L'égalité successorale entre hommes et femmes”

In 2004, she published two articles, one of them was published in Brussels about Feminism and Islam in the Personal Status Code of Tunisia “ Féminisme et Islam dans le Code du statut personnel tunisien”, “La pensée et les hommes, Editions Espace de libertés.”; while the other article discussed the topic of equality between women and men in the Constitution “Constitution et égalité hommes et femmes”, Droit constitutionnel et principe d'égalité.” Dr. Meziou occupied different positions.

Becoming the Director of the Research Unit on International Private Relations: Trade and Arbitration, Migrations in the Faculty of Legal Sciences, a member of the Academy of Comparative Law (2007) was not her last time in leadership. In 2017, Meziou became President of the commission created for Tunisia's accession to The Hague Conventions, as Tunisia had acceded in her mandate to the three conventions proposed by the committee. She was also the president of the reform commission of the Code of Private International Law (2018-2019).



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Although she wrote about diverse topics in Law, Arbitration, and Conflict and occupied various positions nationally to internationally, Meziou dedicated the majority of her work to the sake of women's interest defending their rights and demanding legal and social reform. Throughout her entire career, Dr. Meziou has not lost track of her vision and beliefs which made her not only an exceptional lawyer but also a pioneering woman and dedicated human rights advocate.

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1. Most of the information used in this article are obtained from an exchange we had with Dr. Meziou via emails, on file with the authors. CV, <https://www.beitalhikma.tn/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Kalthoum-Dorai-Meziou.pdf>
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Kudirat M.O Kekere-Ekun (Nigeria)

Supreme Court Judge

By Pedi Obani, Ph.D.

Hon. Justice Kudirat Motonmori Olatokunbo Kekere-Ekun is a serving Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria. She is the 5th and youngest female to be appointed as a Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria. This article examines the early life, education, and notable achievements of Hon. Justice K.M.O. Kekere-Ekun.

Justice Kekere-Ekun was born in London, the United Kingdom on 7th May 1958. Her parents were both indigenes of Lagos State, Nigeria. She is the eldest of eleven siblings from both parents. Her father, Alhaji Senator H.A.B. Fasinro, OFR, LL.D, was a fervent Muslim and a very dedicated family man of noble lineage. He belonged to at least 3 Royal Families in Lagos. He was a legal practitioner and very active in politics. Throughout his career, he worked for many years as a Crown Counsel in the old Western Region of Nigeria. He also became the Town Clerk of Lagos City Council (similar to being the Mayor of Lagos). In 1975, at the age of 56 years, he retired voluntarily from the civil service. He subsequently became a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1983. His tenure was however brought to an abrupt end with the overthrow of the Alhaji Shehu Shagari-led civilian government in a military coup in December 1983. He was also an author. He died at the age of 99 on 31st March 2019.

Her mother, Mrs. Winifred Layiwola Ogundimu (née Savage), is a devout Christian. She studied nursing in the UK, where she qualified as a Public Health Nurse before returning to Nigeria in December 1965. Upon her return to Nigeria, she built her career in the civil service of Lagos State and retired years later, at the age of 60. Mrs. Ogundimu is currently the head of a large and prominent Lagos family, the Savage Family.

Alhaji Senator H.A.B. Fasinro, OFR, LL.D, and Mrs. Winifred Layiwola Ogundimu both remarried when K.M.O. Kekere-Ekun was still young. K.M.O. Kekere-Ekun grew up in a polygamous home with her father, stepmothers, siblings, and other relations. One of her stepmothers, who greatly influenced her life, was a teacher. She was brought up in an extremely strict and disciplined environment at home, where she was taught lasting values such as hard work, integrity, contentment, and the ability to get on with most people and to cope with most situations. It was always a full house with extended family and other school children spending their holidays, to earn extra tutoring and a disciplined upbringing.



Kudirat M.O Kekere-Ekun (Nigeria)

Supreme Court Judge

By Pedi Obani, Ph.D.

K.M.O. Kekere-Ekun was privileged with quality education. She attended private primary schools before proceeding in 1970 to Queen's College, Lagos, which was the best Federal Government College for girls in the country at the time. She studied Law at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, from 1977 to 1980 and obtained her LL.B in 1980. Following this, she attended the Nigerian Law School from 1980 to 1981 and was called to the Nigerian Bar in July 1981. From 1981 to 1982, she was engaged in the compulsory National Youth Service at the Ministry of Justice, Benin City, Bendel State (now Edo State). Afterward, she proceeded to the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) where she obtained a master's degree in law in 1983.

After qualifying as a lawyer and obtaining a master's degree in law from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), she worked in private law practice for a few years. As a result of the toll of the demands of private practice on her domestic responsibilities, she decided to join the bench to be able to enjoy more predictable work hours. She applied and was appointed by the Lagos State Judiciary as a Senior Magistrate Grade II in December 1989. This marked the beginning of her career on the bench. She was subsequently appointed a Judge of the High Court of Lagos State on 19th July 1996. In September 2004, she was elevated to the Court of Appeal. As a Justice of the Court of Appeal, she served in five different Divisions across the country. She was the pioneer Presiding Justice of the Makurdi Division of the Court of Appeal, and also served as the Presiding Justice of the Akure Division of the Court of Appeal before her elevation to the Supreme Court on 8th July 2013. She is currently a member of the Supreme Court Rules Committee and Chairman of the Supervisory Committee of the Litigation Department of the Court.

K.M.O. Kekere-Ekun served as Chairman of the Robbery and Firearms Tribunal, Zone II, Ikeja, Lagos, from November 1996 till May 1999, when the Tribunals were abolished. The constitution of the Tribunal included one Police officer and one Military officer. In the process, the Police officer gained significant insight into the requirements for conducting effective criminal investigations and prosecutions. He was subsequently posted to the Police College (where recruits are trained) as a lecturer and was able to share a lot of what he had learned from his participation in the Tribunal hearings. In recognition of her reputation for integrity and hard work, she was one of 3 Judges of the Lagos State High Court first selected to try offenses relating to financial crimes and money laundering under the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Establishment Act, 2004 and the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, 2000.



Kudirat M.O Kekere-Ekun (Nigeria)

Supreme Court Judge

By Pedi Obani, Ph.D.

Furthermore, in 2003, K.M.O. Kekere-Ekun served as a member of the Ethics Curriculum Planning Committee of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), in collaboration with the Department for International Development (DFID) and UNODC. This committee produced the Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees. She also chaired the Public Complaints and Training Committee that was part of the UNODC pilot project on strengthening judicial integrity and capacity in Lagos State. This was from February 2003 till July 2004. The Public Complaints Committee investigated complaints against magistrates in the performance of their official duties and became pivotal for the reform of the justice delivery system in the magistrate courts. Moreover, she served as a supervisory judge in charge of the Apapa Magisterial District in Lagos State from October 2002 till July 2004. She also served as a member of the committee that drafted the High Court of Lagos State (Civil Procedure) Rules 2004 from April 2002 till December 2002. The new Civil Procedure Rules introduced innovations in case management such as the front-loading concept, pre-trial conference, and the application of ADR mechanisms for the speedy dispensation of justice. The innovations have also been adopted by most states of the Federation and have proved particularly helpful in the speedy dispensation of electoral disputes.

From December 2001 till December 2004, she served as a member of the Steering Committee of the Lagos State Multi-Door Court House, the first court-connected Alternative Dispute Resolution center in Africa. At the Court of Appeal, she served on the Information Technology Committee, which was to facilitate the computerization of the Court. Hon. Justice K.M.O. Kekere-Ekun is a recipient of prestigious awards. She was a recipient of the Merit Awards of the Lagos State Judiciary, in December 2003 and in September 2013. Again, she was twice awarded the Distinguished Trailblazers Awards by the Nigerian Bar Association Women Forum (August 2012 and 2014). She belongs to several professional associations and groups, including the National Association of Women Judges; International Association of Women Judges; Body of Benchers – Life Bencher W.E.F. 8th February 2018; Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (Fellow); and International Dispute Resolution Institute (Fellow). She is also a member of the Ikoyi Club 1938. Hon. Justice K.M.O. Kekere-Ekun has been married to Mr. Akin Kekere-Ekun, OFR, since December 1983. His work ethic and integrity have been a great motivating factor for her. Their union is blessed with three children who are all graduates and excelling in their chosen fields. K.M.O. Kekere-Ekun is passionate about self-examination, being the change that one wants to see in the world and setting your standards early, starting every endeavor in the same manner as one means to carry on. These have been her guiding principles in her personal and professional life.

1. Personal interviews with Justice Kudirat M.O Kekere-Ekun. Juoy, 2020 (on file with author)

2. CV of Justice Kudirat M.O Kekere-Ekun, on file with author.



Ligia Dias Fonseca (Cape Verde)

First President of the Cabo Verdean Bar Association

By Donovan Carter

On Aug 24, 1963, in Beira, Mozambique, the First Lady of Cape Verde, Her Excellency Ligia Fonseca was born. Fonseca is a woman with great knowledge, great passion, and even greater influence. Much more than a First Lady, Mrs. Fonseca has served in various roles as an attorney, activist, and advocate for women and girls across the globe.

Studying at the University of Lisbon Law School, Ligia would come to find something much more life-changing than just a law degree. Before her graduation in 1987, Ligia would meet a man named Jorge Carlos Fonseca, the future president of Cape Verde. After completing their studies and marrying in 1989, the couple moved to Macau, where Mrs. Fonseca would work in the public sector. The new couple would return to Cabo Verde in 1991, where Mrs. Fonseca practiced law in the capital city of Praia, on Santiago Island.

During her time in Cabo Verde, Mrs. Fonseca would be very successful as a legal practitioner. In 2001, Mrs. Fonseca became the first elected President of the Cabo Verdean Bar Association, where she served until 2004. While in this role, Fonseca would be instrumental in drafting legal documents and policies for the government of Cabo Verde, like the Code of Business (1999), the Code for Real Estate Marketing (2012), the Penal Code (2003), and Law of the Ports (2009). The First Lady is also a distinguished legal scholar, co-authoring “The Guide to Women’s Rights”, published by the Institute for the Condition of Women in 1997. Since then, the First Lady has remained an active writer, publishing several articles in Cabo Verde.

As the work of the First Lady focuses primarily on citizenship education, human rights advocacy, and promoting gender equality, she has used her political role for very noble causes. First Lady Fonseca is very active in bettering the lives of children and girls. The First Lady serves as honorary godmother of the Aldeias Infantis SOS child care centers, as well as the COLMEIA Association, which is a non-profit organization supporting children with special needs. As a leader who is no stranger to spreading cheer to others, the First Lady also leads the Natal Solidaria Project, which organizes Christmas parties for needy children of Cabo Verde.

The First Lady has taken up many causes benefitting children and those in need, regardless of where they are. Such causes are not limited to Cabo Verde, as the First Lady has been an active voice for causes from her birth country Mozambique and for causes and people in the United States.



Ligia Dias Fonseca (Cape Verde)

First President of the Cabo Verdean Bar Association

By Donovan Carter

The First Lady has continued to amplify the voices of not only her fellow citizens but African women as a whole, like the 14-year-old Cameroonian-American philanthropist Mongai Fankam. In 2017, First Lady Fonseca visited the American South for the first time at Johnson C. Smith University in North Carolina, to help Mongai highlight the global issues and challenges surrounding access to education, something that affects millions of African girls.

In 2019, the First Lady would return to the U.S in response to Cyclone Idai, which disastrously swept through Mozambique in March of 2019. Months later, First Lady Fonseca would continue to seek aid from citizens of Cabo Verde from all over the world, including the United States. When asked about her outreach in a November 2019 fundraiser, First Lady Fonseca stated that “We are not doing this for our country, but for our brothers and sisters in other countries.” Her passion for service combined with legal expertise has put First Lady Fonseca in a great position to do incredible good.

First Lady Fonseca’s good work does not go unnoticed, as she has received several honors and awards. In 2014, Fonseca received the Global Inspirational Leadership Award from the Center for Economic Development and Leadership, an NGO under the UN’s Economic and Social Council. The following year in 2015, Fonseca received the Outstanding Leadership Award from the African Horizons Forum and was even the Keynote Speaker for the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization. It is truly inspiring to see such an influential leader be involved with and active in advocating for global causes. First Lady of Cabo Verde, Ligia Fonseca, is a woman who possesses a strong mind, storing and producing great legal knowledge, and an even stronger heart that possesses compassion and a drive to make a change.

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Lillian E Tibatemwa, Ph.D. (Uganda)

Supreme Court Judge (Uganda)

By Winnie Tarinyeba Kiryabwire

Lillian Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza grew up in a family of seven children where she was the youngest child. Born to a mother who was a trained nurse and a father who trained as a teacher but worked as an Administrator in Uganda's Civil Service. She often says that perhaps it was because she was the youngest of the "brood", the "last" to come along that she has worked hard and emerged a woman of firsts in many areas. And in her words, she also says "My father expected academic excellence and nothing less from all his children. He did not discriminate the girl-child from the boy-child and we all went to the best available schools of the time. I am grateful to my mother whose love gave me self - confidence and my father whose pride in me always made me reach for the highest goal."

Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza spent the first thirteen years of her formal education in all-girls boarding Christian/Missionary schools. She joined Makerere University for a Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) Degree where she emerged the second-best student in her graduating class and was retained as a Teaching Assistant by the School of Law under the Staff Development Program. This was the beginning of a distinguished career in academia. She was subsequently awarded a Commonwealth Universities Scholarship to Bristol University for her Master of Laws Degree in Commercial Law. In 1995, she graduated with a doctorate in Law from the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, making her the first East African female to graduate with a Ph.D. in Law. Her other qualifications include a Diploma in Legal Practice.

Before joining the judiciary in 2013, Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza was a Professor of Law and Deputy Vice-Chancellor in charge of Academic Affairs at Makerere University in Uganda. She is the first woman to hold the position of Vice-Chancellor as well as that of Deputy Vice-Chancellor in the nearly 100-year history of Uganda's largest and oldest institution of higher learning. She was also the first female in East Africa to be appointed Associate Professor of Law and subsequently, the first female in East Africa to be appointed Professor of Law. She is a woman of many firsts, both in Uganda and East Africa.

Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza is a highly experienced and widely researched legal scholar in judicial and legal matters. Her work has often entailed studying and analyzing the law and legal institutions in socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts. For the most part, she has engaged in empirical legal research and examined the interaction between law and legal institutions on the one hand, and non-legal social institutions (such as culture) and social factors on the other.



Lillian E Tibatemwa, Ph.D. (Uganda)

Supreme Court Judge (Uganda)

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She has in most cases applied qualitative research methods to enlist the relevant information/data. The work thus links the law with the socio-economic and cultural milieu, offering an invaluable critique of the law from “a lived reality” perspective. It also presents important lessons for law reform and development. Her interests and scholarly contribution lie in Comparative Criminal Jurisprudence; Transnational Crime; Gender Crime and Criminology; Human Rights Perspectives of Criminal Law; Children’s Rights; Juvenile Justice; Rights of People with Disability; Gender and the Law; Social, Economic and Cultural Rights; Constitutionalism and the Rule of Law; Public Interest Litigation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Electoral Justice.

Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza is the author of numerous scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals and also the author of pioneer textbooks on the substantive law of crime based on judicial interpretation of Uganda’s principal legislation (the penal code). Books authored include:

- A Judicial Bench Book on Violence against Women in Commonwealth East Africa, published by the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2016.
- A Comparative Review of Presidential Election Court Decisions in East Africa. With F. Ssempebwa, E. Munuo, and Busingye Kabumba. (2016).
- Offences Against the Person: Homicides and Non-Fatal Assaults in Uganda (2005).
- Criminal Law in Uganda: Sexual Assaults and Offences against Morality (2005).
- Women’s Violent Crime in Uganda: More Sinned Against than Sinning (1998).

Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza is a Justice of the Supreme Court in Uganda and Commissioner, International Commission of Jurists, and a Board Member of the African Judges and Jurists Forum. In 2019, she was appointed as a judge of the Court of Appeal of Seychelles, the (highest court in the land) by the President of Seychelles. Although she joined the Ugandan judiciary in 2013, Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza was one of the pioneer trainers on the Jurisprudence of Equality Programme which introduced the training of Judicial Officers in the area of Gender and Human Rights. She also monitored the training of Kenya and Zimbabwe’s Judicial Officers under the Jurisprudence of Equality Programme, 2002.

Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza is a Certified Judicial Educator and an alumnus of the prestigious Commonwealth Judicial Education Institute (CJEI), Nova Scotia, Canada; the National Judicial College, USA and the National Judicial College, Australia.



Lillian E Tibatemwa, Ph.D. (Uganda)

Supreme Court Judge (Uganda)

By Winnie Tarinyeba Kiryabwire

Since joining the Judiciary in 2013, she has facilitated the training of judicial officers in various areas such as mainstreaming gender into judicial processes, public interest litigation, adjudicating the right to health – all these are areas dealing with human rights law and human rights regimes. Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza has also facilitated the training of judicial officers in judicial writing/judgment writing. At the national level, these programs have been under the auspices of the Uganda Judiciary; at the regional level it has been under the auspices of the East African Court of Justice and the Judicial Institute for Africa and at the international level, it has been under the auspices of the International Committee of Jurists.

Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza is also a co-author of a Judicial Bench Book on Violence against Women in Commonwealth East Africa, published in 2016. The book is a tool for training judicial and other officers in the Justice, Law and Order Sector and also acts as a quick reference for judicial officers. The book situates violence against women within both a human rights and gender perspective. Through case law, the book discusses measures to address violence against women and the role of the judiciary in ensuring that the state fulfills its obligations. Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza has been a Visiting Scholar at renowned research institutions such as the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study in South Africa and the Danish Institute for Human Rights. Lillian has also been offered a fellowship by the Cornell University Law School, U.S.A.

Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza was declared the winner of the Best Judgments at the Supreme Court (2018) based on The Uganda Judiciary Performance Score Card 2018. As a judge, she has authored meticulously researched and robustly articulated opinions that have clarified and advanced the law in several fields ranging from constitutional law, the resolution of tax disputes, land law, and criminal justice. Justice Professor Lillian Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza has proved to be as excellent a judge as she is a scholar. Her meticulously researched and robustly articulated judicial opinions have already clarified and advanced the law in several fields, ranging from electoral law to the resolution of tax disputes. She has already left a distinct mark on Uganda's jurisprudence, whose reverberations will continue to be felt for many years to come.

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Linda Kasonde (Zambia)

First Woman President of the Law Society

By Tabeth Masengu, Ph.D.

If you ask politically aware Zambians who Advocate Linda Kasonde is, they will probably tell you that she was "that woman Law Association of Zambia (LAZ) President who stood up to the ruling party at a time when many people didn't". You will probably hear that she was the first woman LAZ President, she was not afraid of anybody, and they will never forget her. How could they? Kasonde broke new ground by ascending to the top of LAZ as a woman. Still, she was also a woman who was not afraid to state when the government went beyond Constitutional remits or when she felt that the LAZ had to make legal pronouncements on critical national matters. Her two-year term as the helm of LAZ brought an assertive and refreshing legal perspective that some felt had been lacking from LAZ in previous years.

Kasonde's journey to becoming the head of Zambia's professional legal body started in Lusaka, Zambia where she grew up. Her interest in activism was sparked by attending Waterford Kamhlaba, a school in Eswatini that promoted multi-racialism in response to apartheid in neighboring South Africa. She recalls that she enjoyed studying English and History but was not sure what career to pursue. Her mother, a medical doctor, had always told her two daughters that as women it was essential to have a profession because "whatever happens to you, you will always have that thing to fall back on".

Thus perhaps subconsciously influenced by her mother's advice, Kasonde chose to pursue a law degree at Leicester University in England. After that, she was admitted to the Zambian Bar in 2001. After being admitted to the Zambian Bar, Kasonde preceded to work as an advocate at the National Legal Aid Clinic for Women until 2004, when she was subsequently hired by Mulenga Mundashi & Company, where she served as an Associate until 2007. She later obtained her Masters in Commercial Law (LLM) in 2007 from the University of Cape Town in South Africa. She returned to the law firm in 2009 when Mulenga Mundashi & Company, added Kasonde to its name. This made her the first woman in Zambia to be promoted to named partner in an established and internationally recognized Zambian law firm.

In the seven years preceding her remarkable rise to President of LAZ, Kasonde worked hard to acquire more training, experience, and exposure. In 2012, she completed the Lawyers Management Programme with IE law school within IE University in Spain. The following year Kasonde undertook the Harvard University Leadership in the 21st Century Executive program.



Linda Kasonde (Zambia)

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The year 2014 was a busy year for Kasonde; she took part in the Archbishop Desmond Tutu Leadership Fellowship run by the African Leadership and the International Visitor's Leadership Programme, Women in Politics and Social Affairs run by the United States of America State Department. Kasonde also became a member Chartered Institute of Arbitrators London and Zambia Branch. Apart from all these achievements. She held the positions of Honorary Secretary of the LAZ and Vice-President and thus her election as President of the Association in 2016 was a culmination of determination, hard work, and grit.

She would need this grit when she took over the helm at LAZ because Zambia was in a period where there appeared to be a disregard for the rule of law and constitutionalism. This was heightened because the 2016 elections had been marred with controversy, allegations of vote-rigging, and questions about the judiciary's role in resolving electoral disputes. Further, as LAZ President, one of the main battles waged was fighting against a constitutional amendment that permitted a minister to remain at his job even after the dissolution of Parliament. The LAZ opposed this and demanded that being a member of Parliament was a requisite for a Minister to hold office.

In her own words "as president of the Association, I wasn't very popular with the government and was discredited by the news media. But we defended our positions, and four days before the general elections the Constitutional Court ruled in our favour". The court not only established that the ministers would have to leave their position after the dissolution of Parliament but also ordered that they return their salaries and any emoluments they had received during the period in which they had illegally occupied their position.

Kasonde has been frank about the sexism, vitriol, and patriarchal attitudes she faced while in charge. She has been open about the fact that women face more scrutiny and judgment than men do in leadership positions. Her steadfastness and commitment to see things through amidst political and personal attacks have not gone unnoticed. In 2016 she was awarded the Zambia Society for Public Administration's Justice Irene Chirwa Mambilima Distinguished Award to recognize her contribution to the advancement of public service excellence in Zambia. In 2017 she was the recipient of the IE University's Extraordinary People Inspiring the IE Community (EPIC) Award, and The Africa Report named her as one of the people to watch out for in 2017 in Southern Africa.



Linda Kasonde (Zambia)

First Woman President of the Law Society

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In 2019 Kasonde branched out and opened her own firm LCK chambers and founded Chapter One Foundation Limited, where she is currently the Executive Director. Chapter One Foundation promotes and protects human rights, human rights defenders, constitutionalism, social justice, and the rule of law in Zambia, primarily through strategic litigation, advocacy, and capacity building. To further cement her pioneer status, in April 2019, she was elected as the Vice-President for Africa for the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, the first Zambian to hold that position. Kasonde is a pioneer and role model to Zambian and African women alike because of her achievements and her courage in her career. Additionally, it would seem that the lessons Kasonde learned from *Daring to Fail*, a book written by Billi Lim, have not only inspired her, but they have set the stage for many other young women to "dare to fail".

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Maimouna Kane Toure (Senegal)

Justice of the Supreme Court

By Sémou DIOUF

Born in Dakar in 1937, Maimouna Kane Touré (née Ndongo) held positions such as Auditor of the Supreme Court, Deputy Public Prosecutor of the Republic, Counsel of the Court of Appeal a judge of the Supreme Court of Senegal, and the first woman to be appointed as a member of the government under President Abdou Diouf. Maimouna Kane married businessman Yaya Kane, with whom she had five (5) children. After the latter's death, she married Mamoudou Touré, an economist who served as the Minister of Finance between May 1983 and April 1988. Maimouna Ndongo Kane Touré, prior to obtaining the aforementioned achievements, had to overcome significant hurdles as a young girl. Growing up in Senegal, most families then were then reluctant to send their daughters to school.

Maimouna came from a very conservative family that viewed western education as a threat to their traditional African values and customs. Upon her birth, her father had stated to her mother that his wish was for his daughters not to be formally educated in school. If the culture in those days, and her father's utterances, were obeyed Maimouna would definitely not have known the aforesaid achievements. Her father died two months after her birth and, being intellectually curious, and upon observing her neighbors send their daughters to school she posed questions to her mother on why she was not allowed to attend school. Her mother explained the wish of her father prior to his death but granted her permission to consult her designated guardian. Little Maimouna, armed with a wish and unshakable ambition, succeeded in convincing her tutor to allow her to attend school. With his permission, she commenced her education and proved to be a gifted and smart student even in the face of dissuasion and discouragement from her entourage who expressed to her that she was bound for failure.

However, Maimouna was not one to abandon her ambitions because of the negative opinions of those around her nor societal customs. She was determined to achieve her goals and turn her dreams into reality. And so she did. It was difficult to simultaneously juggle the roles of a good mother and that of a good student. In the words of one of her professors, "I am amazed by one of my students. Each year, she obtains a certificate, and a baby." She's been known to have taken an exam the day after spending a night at the maternity ward. Living life experiencing such discouraging circumstances in her youth, Maimouna Kane Touré still managed to excel as the pioneering woman of her country.



Maimouna Kane Toure (Senegal)

Justice of the Supreme Court

By Sémou DIOUF

Maimouna Kane Toure was a judge, a stateswoman, and a woman who spearheaded many initiatives concerning women's rights and emancipation. Upon joining the socialist government of President Abdou Diouf on 15 March 1978, Maimouna was appointed State Secretary to the Prime Minister and was responsible for the promotion of women's affairs. She became Minister of Social Development in the government of Moustapha Niasse, formed on 5 April 1983. Her immersion in the political field was the result of a speech rendered during an official ceremony of courts and tribunals. Her provocative speech, shared with President Senghor, denounced and criticized inequalities and discrimination against women, defended their causes, and highlighted how women were often left out of public policies.

Maimouna Kane Toure understood that the government needed to take measures to uphold the rights of women. Her advocacy undoubtedly convinced the President to work in favor of all women. Maimouna drew the attention of President Senghor on inequalities, injustices, and violations of women's rights. In a speech, he promised to restore women in their rights. When she joined the government, Maimouna did her best to put women in better conditions. Some other achievements of Maimouna Kane included being able to convince members of parliament, overwhelmingly composed of men, to vote for the bill of rights on maternity leave. Today, women in Senegal have the right to maternity leave and continue receiving their salary all due to her arduous efforts. Also, due to her tenacity and determined nature women in Senegal can occupy all positions today, with progressively more appointed to the highest positions in various sectors.

Maimouna Kane Toure was able to significantly improve working conditions for women living in rural areas by introducing machinery into various tasks. She would initiate the construction of various mills and drillings through villages. Although she inspired the bill of rights, which established gender parity in Senegal in 2010 during the second term of President Wade, she voluntarily resigned from the government for health reasons. Maimouna would then return to the court as a judge. Upon retirement, following a long and prosperous career in the public office of justice and government, Maimouna became president of a foundation named "fondation Abdou Diouf, sport et vertu." Maimouna Kane has inspired many women to dare and decide to take their fate into their own hands. She was undoubtedly a pioneer in the fight for the emancipation of women in Senegal. Today, Maimouna Kane remains a source of inspiration and motivation for all women in Africa and particularly in Senegal.



Maimouna Kane Toure (Senegal)

Justice of the Supreme Court

By Sémou DIOUF

"The end of an exceptional journey that leaves an eternal legacy....impossible to forget given how she throughout her lifetime fought to improve the status and plight of women in both urban and rural areas". These are the opening lines of a tribute paid to Maimouna Kane Toure upon her death in March 2019 by Ms. Dior Fall Sow, a retired judge and the first woman Public Prosecutor of Senegal. Maimouna Kane Toure, in her lifetime, served as an inspirational and pivotal role model for both women and young girls.

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Mariam Jack-Denton (The Gambia)

First Woman Lawyer (The Gambia)

By Nirlash Karki

Mariam Jack-Denton, otherwise known as Ajaratou Mariam Denton, was born on December 29, 1952. She is the daughter of prominent Gambian politician/businessman Sir Alieu Sulayman Jack who served two terms as Speaker of the then House of Representatives and was the second Governor-General of The Gambia. Her mother was Lady Yai Marie Jack. Mariam Denton grew up in a large household with five siblings. Sulayman Jack and her daughter were not the only ones in the family who would be active political figures in The Gambia. Her brother Sulayman Bun Jack, served as the Permanent Secretary at the Department of Defense during Dawda Jawara's government, up until the 1994 Gambian coup d'état.

In 1979, Mariam Jack-Denton was the first Gambian woman to be called to the Bar. She is also a Member of the Nigerian Bar and was part of the first wave of lawyers in the 1970s joining the Gambian Bar that was primarily trained in Africa, a trend which started following the entry of Abubacarr N.M.O Darboe into the Gambian Bar. Mariam's calling was only the beginning as it prompted a trend that would lead women undoubtedly joining and becoming a substantive part of the Gambian Bar, leading to the increase in the number of women in the Gambian Bar.

Mariam Jack-Denton was a brilliant lawyer from the beginning. She served as State Counsel, Senior State Counsel, and Principal State Council. She would later serve as the Legal Adviser to the Central Bank Governor, where she opened the Legal Unit of the Bank. Her career was halted following the 1994 coup d'état that ousted then-President Dawda Jamara and established the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) as Gambia's ruling government. Following such tumultuous events, Jack-Denton started practicing law independently. Her barrister chambers were located in Serign Madou Sillah Street in Banjul and provided pro bono "general barrister and solicitor services to local and international clients." She held the position of legal advisor to the United Democratic Party. Because of her strong affiliation with the United Democratic Party, Jack-Denton was targeted by the Jammeh government, and in April 2006 when she was arbitrarily arrested at her home and was detained for over 111 days at the Mile II central prisons. The government accused her of plotting to conceal the abortive March 21st, 2006 coup that was masterminded by the former army chief of defense. Jack-Denton's arrest was contested in the High Court for violating Section 19 of the Constitution of Gambia 1997. She was released from detention by the High Court but re-arrested again in defiance of the court order. The case against her was eventually dropped.



Mariam Jack-Denton (The Gambia)

First Woman Lawyer (The Gambia)

By Nirlash Karki

The 2016 Gambian presidential elections finally ousted Yahya Jammeh as the leader of Gambia and elected Adam Barrow as the new President. Mariam Jack-Denton was one of the five individuals nominated by President Barrow to be one of the nominated members of the National Assembly. On the same day, she was confirmed as the new Speaker of the National Assembly, a post her father held for two terms when the legislative body was known as the House of Representatives. She was unanimously elected by the Honorable Members of the National Assembly. With her confirmation, Jack-Denton was entrusted with the difficult task of helping the Coalition government to achieve its objectives in the post-Jammeh Gambia. She was named as one of the 100 most influential African women by Avance Media in 2019. As of 13th May 2020, Mariam Jack-Denton is still serving as the speaker for the Gambian National Assembly.

Mariam Jack-Denton's story is inspirational and earnest. She started as an anomaly in the Gambian legal profession but she did not remain so for a long time. A wave of female lawyers followed in her footsteps, diversifying the demography of Gambian law practitioners. However, her contributions are not limited to being the first woman lawyer in The Gambia. Jack-Denton also used her legal expertise to better serve her country especially during tumultuous periods of political upheavals. She persevered and fought against an oppressive government. Additionally, Jack-Denton has been a key figure in events like the Legislative Scrutiny Workshop held in 2019 that aimed to advance the legislative system of the Gambia. Honorable Mariam Jack-Denton has not only been an expert lawyer but an active agent in bringing forth progress to her country. She is not just a bright star but a guiding source of light.

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Mary Mamyassin Sey (The Gambia)

First Woman Judge (The Gambia)

By Mariama Koroma

Sey, Mary MamYassin (née Williams), is a Judge of the Supreme Court of The Gambia in West Africa. She was born in Banjul, The Gambia on 21 March 1952. Her father Daniel George Williams was a pharmacist and her mother Elsie Mac Williams (née Mac Mason) was a teacher. On 18th September 1980, she married Abdoulie Sey and their union was blessed with two children, a girl Anita-Yata Sey and a boy Yusufa Sey. Justice Sey began her early primary and secondary education at the St. Josephs' Convent in Banjul and after passing her Ordinary-Level exams, she proceeded to The Gambia High School in Banjul for her Sixth Form Advanced-Level education in English Language & Literature, French, and History. She was appointed as Head girl of the school during the period 1971-1972. Upon attaining her A-Levels she proceeded to Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone where she pursued a Degree in Psychology, Sociology, and English. In 1976, she graduated with a B.A Honours Degree in English.

Her professional career started in September 1976 when she was appointed by the Ministry of Education as a graduate teacher at Lamin High School where she taught English Language, English Literature, and History. However, the idea of pursuing a Law Degree had constantly been on Justice Sey's mind and so in September 1979, she applied to the Establishment Office in Banjul for a transfer from the Education Department to the Attorney General's Chambers as a Cadet Administrative officer. A year later in 1980, she was awarded a scholarship by the British Council to pursue an LL.B Honours Degree at the University of Wales, Institute of Science and Technology (UWIST) in Cardiff, Wales.

After completing her education abroad, Justice Sey returned to The Gambia in 1984 to take up an appointment in the Judiciary as a Magistrate. Then in September 1988, she proceeded to the Nigerian Law School in Lagos, Nigeria where she obtained her Barrister at Law Certificate. She was called to the Gambian Bar in 1989 and after a short stint in private practice as a Legal Practitioner, she broke new grounds when in October 1998 she was appointed as the first female High Court Judge of The Gambia. However, the "honeymoon" did not last long as she resigned in February 2003 because she had encountered a lot of interference on the Bench from the Executive arm of Government. After her resignation, she secured appointments with international organizations such as the UN, ECOWAS, the British Council, and the Commonwealth Secretariat and she has worked in various jurisdictions all over the world such as Liberia and Sierra Leone in West Africa, Swaziland in Southern Africa and Vanuatu in the South Pacific as Legal Adviser and Judge respectively.



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Between March 2004 -July 2004, she participated as a Judicial System Monitor with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) where her main responsibilities were monitoring Court proceedings, including the administrative aspects of the process. Thereon, from August 2004 to August 2006, she became a Legal Adviser to the Executive Secretary of the ECOWAS Office in Liberia on legal matters relating to the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Liberia from August 2004 to August 2006. She was later appointed in 2007 by the British Council under the Justice Sector Development Programme (JSDP), to work as a Judge of the High Court of Sierra Leone from March 2007 to October 2010. In Sierra Leone, she presided over both Criminal and Civil Cases. In November 2010, Sey was appointed by the Commonwealth Secretariat and assigned to the Kingdom of Eswatini (Swaziland) on a two-year contract. She was later re-assigned by the Commonwealth Secretariat to Vanuatu, South Pacific Islands. In September 2012, she rose to become the first African and only female Judge on the Bench in Vanuatu and she held that position until she left in May 2017 to assume her current position as a Judge of the Supreme Court of The Gambia. Her assertiveness and hard work made an impact in the Supreme Court of Vanuatu and changed the narrative of having all-male Judges.

Sey's assignment to Vanuatu by the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2010 was a milestone in pushing forward the gender dynamic and empowerment of women in the country. In her role, she handled a vast amount of high-profile cases most notably the trial and conviction of 14 members of the Vanuatu Parliament (out of 52 including the Deputy Prime Minister, the Speaker, and 5 Ministers). See *Public Prosecutor v Kalosil Judgment as to verdict* [2015] VUSC 135; Criminal Case 73 of 2015 (9 October 2015). They were sentenced to between three and four years imprisonment respectively for the crimes of corruption and bribery of officials, (see *Public Prosecutor v Kalosil - Sentence* [2015] VUSC 149; Criminal Case 73 of 2015 (22 October 2015). In her judgments, she maintained a firm view that "...corruption offences, if left unchecked, can quickly erode and eventually undo the work ethic of public officers in any nation. Needless to say that a Government cannot survive, no matter how good its aims and intentions are, if corruption exists within its ranks."

The then-Speaker of the Vanuatu Parliament and acting President of Vanuatu at the time, Arcellino Pipite, attempted to abuse the Presidential pardon power under the constitution by pardoning himself and the other MPs who had been found guilty of corruption.



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This act appeared to contravene the Constitution, which states that the President's powers to pardon can only be used after sentencing and not before. It was therefore overturned by the Court. In the course of the trial of the 14 MPs, Sey faced many challenges involving threats and intimidation which became exposed when a key member of the opposition stated that "the government is trying to deport the Justice." Two factors militated against her as a Judge in Vanuatu, namely, being an African and a woman in a male-dominated society. However, that did not stop her from acting fearlessly by being both assertive and outspoken in her judgments. Her professional experience spans over 42 years, with 35 of these years in the legal field at the Bar and on both the lower and higher Judicial Bench. Interestingly, Justice Sey's life seems to be marked by "firsts", as she is currently the first female President of The Gambia Judges Association (GJA) which was registered in The Gambia in 2019. Sey's life has stretched beyond civic and professional duties to include a strong religious lifestyle. Justice Sey participates fully in Church activities in the Anglican Diocese of The Gambia and in 2019 she was appointed by His Lordship Bishop Yaw Odico as the first female Chancellor of the Anglican Diocese of The Gambia.

Her remarkable achievement has made her the proud recipient of an award as Woman of Substance in the Gambia 2017 from The American Chamber of Commerce, Gambia (AmCham). Also in 2017, The Gambia Bar Association (GBA) presented an award to Justice Sey with the following citation: "Outstanding Professionalism Award" presented to Justice Mary Mam-Yassin Sey High Court of The Gambia in appreciation of your dedicated service and efforts to ensure professionalism and independence of the Judiciary of the Gambia." In addition to pursuing a professional life marked with excellence, Sey actively participated in the publishing of The Gambia Law Reports [1997-2001] GR as a member of The National Law Reporting Council.

Sey's life has been very inspiring, as she has accomplished amazing things such as being the first female High Court and Supreme Court Judge of The Gambia, first African female Judge on the Bench in Vanuatu, first female President of The Gambia Judges Association, first female Chancellor of the Anglican Diocese of The Gambia and she is a pioneer and a role model to many.

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Mathilda Twomey (Seychelles)

First Woman Chief Justice

By Donovan Carter

Mathilda Twomey is the first female judge in the history of Seychelles, and the first woman to hold Chief Justice status in the nation. As an academic and legal expert, her contributions to the Seychelles legal structure and government are quite impressive. Born and raised in Mahe, Seychelles, Twomey received quite a global education. After receiving education at Regina Mundi Convent and Seychelles College, Twomey won a scholarship from the British Council to study law in Europe. During this time, Twomey earned both a Diploma in French Law from the University of Paris-Sud, Sceaux in 1985, and a BA in English and French Law in 1986 from the University of Kent at Canterbury. Twomey continued her studies at the Inns of Court School of Law and was called to the Degree of the Utter Bar at Middle Temple, London in 1987.

Returning to her homeland, Twomey would begin practicing law with Ocean Gate Law Centre and later the Attorney General's Chambers. Twomey's skills as an attorney would improve tremendously, as she took advantage of learning under Justice Francis MacGreggor, future president of the Court of Appeals. Twomey, along with former Attorney General Pesi Pardiwalla, would open their own law firm in 1992. That same year, Twomey would become a member of the Constitutional Commission, which drafted the Constitution of the Third Republic.

Twomey's legal career in her homeland is not the extent of her leadership or work. Continuing her pattern of global experience and education, Twomey would go to Ireland in 1995 to work in community and disability law sectors. A year later in 1996, Twomey became Regional Coordinator for the nongovernmental organization Multiple Sclerosis Ireland. Here, Twomey was active and involved in advocacy and policy development for those with disabilities. While in Ireland, Twomey would study at the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG), earning a Master's in Public Law in 2011. Twomey's love of continued education can be further seen in her advice to younger students at her alma mater, NUIG, where she told them to "know that your dreams can be realised....also know that study on its own can be extremely fulfilling and rewarding." 2011 would continue to be an exciting year, as Twomey was appointed to be a judge on the Court of Appeals in her homeland Seychelles, making her the nation's first woman to ever serve as a judge. August 18, 2015, Judge Mathilda Twomey's barrier-breaking continued, as she was sworn in as the Chief Justice of the Seychelles Supreme Court. During her term of five years, Chief Justice Twomey has dealt with many difficult issues presented before her.



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Being the first woman to ever hold this position, Twomey naturally came across opposition and fought hard to retain her honor and integrity, despite the misdoings of her colleagues, stating that “I, as chief justice, had to choose whether to ignore unacceptable behaviour from a [fellow] judge...It would have been easier, but it would also have been wrong.” Twomey has been an open critic of the failings of the Court, and how justice has not always been served. Under Chief Twomey’s leadership, the Supreme Court of Seychelles has become more efficient and trustworthy, stating that the Court represents “the rule of law in action”, and that the Court can be fair and impartial, even to their own members. Twomey’s work and leadership have improved relations and confidence between the Court and the people.

Holding to her integrity, Supreme Court Justice Mathilda Twomey decided to step down after a singular 5-year term in 2020. Twomey’s career is best described as courageous, as not everyone can be brave enough to study and travel the world, lead a nation’s judicial system, and hold fast to their integrity. “ It is courageous to find (evidence) against a litigant that you might like or admire. It is courageous to file cases against the government or to represent a monster. It is courageous to write a decision that attracts public censure and it is also courageous to disagree with, or even publicly support, your colleagues.” Former Chief Justice Twomey’s courage has not gone unseen, and her courage will continue to inspire African women to be pioneers as well.

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Meaza Ashenafi (Ethiopia)

First Woman Chief Justice (Ethiopia)

By Biruh Gemedo Gage

Meaza Ashenafi Mengistu is the first woman in Ethiopian history to become the President of the Federal Supreme Court (Chief Justice). However, this milestone is not the only accomplishment that makes her a pioneer woman in law. She is well-known as a women's rights advocate who has made immense contributions, among other things, as the co-founder of the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association (EWLA) and founder of women's bank (Enat Bank). Both organizations were the first of their kind in Ethiopia.

Meaza was born on the 25th of July 1964 in a small town called Assosa, now the capital of Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, one of the smallest and least developed regions in Ethiopia. Her father Ashenafi Mengistu was the mayor of Assosa. Hence, Meaza and her eight siblings attended primary and secondary school there. Her mother, Askalech Tegegne, worked at home managing a household of about a dozen people and raising nine children. Meaza says her mother is the source of her strength and played a big role in her success by instilling important values like honesty and fairness at an early age and by encouraging her to study hard even though she never received formal education herself. These values coupled with Meaza's personality of speaking truth to power and being unafraid to challenge authority, especially when witnessing injustice or discrimination, led her to pursue law as a choice of study.

Meaza loved learning and was always one of the top students in her class. She was able to join Addis Ababa University (AAU) in 1981 when she was seventeen because she started primary school early and skipped one year in high school as her grades were very good. When she joined the school of law at AAU, she was the only woman out of fifty students, until the next year when three more women joined the class. This, she says, was very challenging but was also a good opportunity to grow. After graduating from university in 1986, she worked for the Ministry of Trade for about three years. Meaza started her career in the Judiciary through a fresh graduates' recruitment program which sought to alleviate the shortage of judges by appointing qualified young professionals after giving them six months of training working as assistants to judges. Accordingly, she became a judge to the Federal High Court Criminal Bench in 1989 and served there for five years. It was during this time that she noticed how the law itself and the way it was being implemented was discriminatory against women.



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In 1993, she was recruited as a researcher and advisor for the Human Rights Committee of the Ethiopian Constitution Drafting Commission, a body in charge of drafting the current constitution. There, she played a key role by helping draft strong regulations for the protection of women's and children's rights. While she was working in the commission, she was sent to The Hague for training where she was introduced to issues of international human rights and met with various African women advocating for women's rights.

After the job with the constitution drafting commission was completed, Meaza wanted to realize her vision of creating an entity that would make sure laws enacted to protect women's rights are implemented meaningfully. To that end, in 1995, she co-founded Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association (EWLA) together with Atsedewoyin Tekle and other women lawyers. It started its operations the following year and Meaza served as the Executive Directress of the association for eight years. EWLA's mission is to promote the economic, political, social, and legal rights of women and to that end assist them to secure full protection of their rights under the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and other international human rights conventions.

Together with the co-founders and colleagues of EWLA, Meaza has helped introduce major amendments to the Ethiopian family law, criminal law, labor law, citizenship law, pension law, and other national laws in favor of women's rights. One good example of the impact EWLA had on improving criminal legislation is the role it played in criminalizing domestic violence and female genital mutilation. Before that, neither domestic violence nor sexual harassment were considered crimes in Ethiopia. Even the Amharic language, the country's official language, didn't have a vocabulary to express those acts. Meaza says they had to create the phrase "yesetoch teqat" to refer to all violence against women.

Equally important, EWLA was able to open centers where victims and vulnerable women could go and get free legal advice in Addis Ababa and regional towns. They also have about 60 paralegals made up of volunteers which give similar services to women. Overall, EWLA helped more than 100,000 women (during the time Meaza was leading the organization) and they were able to represent women in major cases relating to the abduction of women and other harmful traditional practices. One of the many prominent cases that made EWLA and Meaza popular was the story of a 14-year-old girl who killed a man who abducted, raped, and tried to force her into marriage.



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With Zeresenay Berhane as the producer and Angelina Jolie as its executive producer, this case was later turned into the 2014 Ethiopian film titled “Difret” which shows how Hirut (the victim represented by Meaza/EWLA) pleaded not guilty by reason of self-defense after fatally shooting the man who abducted and raped her. The film went on to win the ‘Audience Award: World Cinema Dramatic’ Award at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival.

After EWLA, Meaza became the acting director of Inter-Africa Group which, among other things, facilitated the debates between different political parties in the 2002 Ethiopian national election. In 2005 she received a scholarship from UNESCO for post-graduate studies in the USA where she studied International Relations at the University of Connecticut. Starting from 2011, Meaza became an adviser to the Gender and Social Policy Development Department of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) for about six years. While working at the UNECA, Meaza volunteered to work for the establishment of the first women's Bank together with other women. Enat Bank, which translates to mean ‘mother bank’, was initiated by eleven Ethiopian women who had a vision of creating a bank that will be equally owned and managed by women. Finally, the bank that focuses on women was established in 2011 and started its operations in 2014. Meaza was selected to be the chair of the Board of Directors until the time she was appointed as chief justice in 2018.

Throughout the years, Meaza Ashenafi has gained domestic and international recognition for her tireless work in promoting women's rights in Ethiopia and receiving numerous awards for philanthropy and leadership. In 2003, she became a Hunger Project African Leadership Prize laureate for her commitment to championing women's rights throughout her career. Meaza is always proud to mention that her husband has always been supportive of her career goals. She is married to Dr. Araya Asfaw, professor of physics and former dean of the science faculty in Addis Ababa University, whom she met while working in EWLA. They have two daughters, Mena and Senait. Apart from the support she got from her family, Meaza usually mentions the importance of teamwork for her success in her career.



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In November 2018, Meaza was appointed as President of the Federal Supreme Court by the House of People's Representatives (the Parliament) after being nominated by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Meaza believes that her appointment as the president of the Federal Supreme Court is the result of the recent political reforms in Ethiopia led by Abiy Ahmed but the unanimous support of the members of parliament to her appointment (without a single objection) is a testament to her accomplishments and the trust that the public has in her. As the president of the supreme court of Ethiopia, Meaza has chosen to restore the public's trust in the judiciary as her main mission. In addition to that, improving gender parity in the judiciary will be another area of focus for her. In 2019 alone, six additional women were appointed as judges at the Federal Supreme Court and Meaza says that this will be continued in the future too. Meaza's office also stresses the need to establish a women judges association for mutual learning and growth between senior and junior judges.

In general, Meaza Ashenafi was chosen as a pioneer woman most importantly because she is the first woman to be appointed as the President (chief justice) of the Supreme Court in Ethiopia's history. However, her accomplishments before this appointment are more than enough to call her not only a pioneer woman but also a pioneer citizen. Being amongst the first group of women to join law school in Ethiopia and being part of the few women selected to participate as an expert in the drafting of the current Ethiopian constitution were her earliest accomplishments. She established and led the first professional association that advocated for women's rights and the first women's bank that aimed to empower women financially. When officials contacted her to propose the appointment, Meaza is quoted as saying, "I told them, if they want business as usual, I'm not the right person for this job." (Aljazeera, 2015). That's why I believe, besides her enormous accomplishments, Meaza's character as an individual and her commitment to promoting justice without shying away from big responsibilities and challenges reaffirms her selection as a pioneer woman.



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Monica Kalyegira Mugenyi (Uganda)

First woman Principal Judge of the First Instance. Division,
East African Court of Justice (EACJ)

By Mchele Lynda Mugenyi

Justice Monica Kalyegira Mugenyi is a Ugandan lawyer and judge of the Ugandan Court of Appeal also known as the Constitutional Court. She was born on August 27, 1969, to Dr. Amos and Margaret Kalyegira. Her father was a Senior Civil Servant and veterinarian, and her mother was a primary teacher who ventured into early childhood learning and became a kindergarten headmistress. Mugenyi received her primary education from Lake Victoria Primary School before attending Gayaza High School from 1983 to 1988. She is a mother of four and is married to Hamu Mugenyi, a Ugandan lawyer and Board Chairman of the Uganda Development Corporation (UDC).

Mugenyi received her Bachelor of Laws from Makerere University, Uganda in 1992 before receiving a Postgraduate Diploma in Legal Practice from the Law Development Centre in Uganda a year later. She also obtained a Master of Laws degree in International Trade Law from the University of Essex in 2002.

Prior to her work on the bench, Mugenyi engaged in development work at the non-government organization Action for Development, where she worked as an Assistant Legal Officer in 1992. From 1993 to 1999, she was a State Attorney in the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's Chambers. She was then promoted to Senior State Attorney before becoming Legal Officer of the Privatisation & Utility Sector Reform Project from the World Bank and the International Development Association (IDA).

Mugenyi has served as a Private Legal Consultant and was working as Manager of Corporate Services for the Uganda Road Fund when she was appointed to the High Court of Uganda in 2010. She was elected to the Land and Criminal Division of the High Court and served as the youngest judge on the bench. Mugenyi was then appointed a judge of the First Instance Division of the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) during the East African Community Heads of State Summit in December 2013. In July 2015, she made history when she began serving as the 'Principal Judge' of the Court and Administrative Head of the First Instance Division, making her the first woman to take on the role. Mugenyi currently serves as a Judge of the Court of Appeal in Uganda, after having served in the EACJ for seven years. She was sworn into the Court of Appeal by President Yoweri K. Museveni on December 10, 2019, and finished her term with the EACJ a year later.



Monica Kalyegira Mugenyi (Uganda)

First woman Principal Judge of the First Instance. Division,
East African Court of Justice (EACJ)

By Michele Lynda Mugenyi

Mugenyi has made decisions on several high-profile and significant cases. These include the case of *Uganda v. Lydia Draru Alias Atim* (2011), in which Lydia Draru was accused of murdering a Ugandan Army General. Draru pleaded not guilty for murder but guilty for manslaughter, as the crime committed was not intentional. Despite the prosecution being “unwilling to amend its indictment to reflect the lesser offense” of manslaughter, Draru was sentenced to 14 years in prison for manslaughter and the case was never appealed, much to a multitude of people’s chagrin. Mugenyi also led the bench in the case of the *Hon. Margaret Zziwa v. The Secretary General of the East African Community* (2017). In this case, the first female Speaker of the East African Legislative Assembly successfully challenged her impeachment in court, on the premise that the procedure adopted to remove her from Office “flouted provisions of the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community...as well as rules of natural justice”. In the case of *Male H. Mbirizi K. Kiwanuka v. The Attorney General of the Republic of Uganda* (2020), Mbirizi lodged a complaint to contest the legality of the actions and procedures taken to enact Uganda’s Constitutional Amendment Act of 2018. This act legalized changing the age limit for Presidents of Uganda, allowing current President Museveni to run for his sixth term. The court ruled that the age limit bill was constitutionally passed and followed all parliamentary procedures. Taking up this case was significant because it sparked a conversation around the importance of judicial ethics in the adjudication of disputes. Finally, Mugenyi led the bench in the case of *Martha Wangari Karua v. The Attorney General of the Republic of Kenya* (2020), in which Karua stood for elective office, lost, and decided to appeal. She was faced with the technicality that all appeals should be disposed of in six months, which was taken by the complainant as a violation of her right to access justice. This stance was held due to the negligence of evidence that she had submitted in time to make the case’s time limits, as well as the High Court of Kenya’s decision to dismiss her election petition without investigating the issue. The EACJ decided in favor of the complainant, arguing that the Respondent State had in fact “violated its commitments to the fundamental and operational principles of the EAC.”

Mugenyi is a member of the Gayaza Old Girls Association and serves as the Chairperson of the East African Development Bank (EADB) Staff Appeals Tribunal. She is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (FCI Arb), UK, and has previously served as a Legal Secretary to the Uganda Road Fund Board, a Non-Executive Director at PRIDE Microfinance Ltd, and a Non-Executive Director at Uganda Seeds Ltd.



Monica Kalyegira Mugenyi (Uganda)

First woman Principal Judge of the First Instance. Division,
East African Court of Justice (EACJ)

By Michele Lynda Mugenyi

Mugenyi has never tried to depict her experience as a young female judge as easy. She has spoken about the mixed reactions a woman's appointment to higher office may elicit, from celebration to cynicism, salutation to opposition, from both men and women. She has also spoken about the mixed feelings people had about her appointment to the Ugandan High Court, and how she was perceived as a "disaster waiting to happen," on more than one occasion. However, Mugenyi's story is a story of perseverance and determination to get the job done. While she has had to face opposition from men and women who did not see her as deserving of her promotions, she has gone out of her way to support and uplift current and future female leaders through her presence at numerous conferences and webinars on women leaders in law. By sharing her own experiences and advice, Mugenyi regularly provides female leaders with the tools needed to succeed. Her advice to women in legal leadership is to develop a healthy work ethic and to create a positive personal brand— you must be known for having integrity and producing results. To succeed, Justice Mugenyi urges women leaders to show up, be present, and be visible.

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Nancy Baraza, Ph.D. (Kenya)

First Woman Deputy Chief Justice (Kenya)

By Karen Koech

The Hon. Lady Justice (Rtd) Dr. Nancy Makokha Baraza is a Kenyan lawyer and currently the Head of the Department of Public law, School of Law, the University of Nairobi where she also teaches Jurisprudence and Legal Theory, Family Law, Social Foundations of Law and Development and Access to Justice. She previously served as the Deputy Chief Justice of the Republic of Kenya and the Vice President of the Supreme Court of Kenya, being the first woman ever to hold these positions.

Dr. Baraza was born on 10th September 1957 to the late Nathan Makokha and the late Racheal Nabifwo in the Mt. Elgon area of Bungoma county of the Republic of Kenya. Her late father was a no-nonsense polygamous man with three wives, as was the common practice in her village in those days. Each of his wives was blessed with a good number of children, making the Makokha family a large family. Her late father was a hard-working and enterprising man who ran retail shops and a transport business which plied routes up to Uganda. He was also an astute farmer growing coffee, vegetables, and cereals for the commercial markets. With this, he was able to bring up his children reasonably comfortably and ensure their education.

Mt. Elgon area is one of the most neglected and disadvantaged areas in the country in terms of infrastructure and social amenities. This is an area that did not have electricity until 2019 and had no tarmac road until 2020. The area is also characterized by occasional and most times tragic clashes over land, a situation which resulted in Dr. Baraza and other villagers spending chilly nights in the bush to hide away from marauding attackers who killed all in their way. Although the Makokha family was 'well off' compared to most other families around, Dr. Baraza was shaped by the impoverished material conditions of her surroundings, with women bearing the brunt of poverty and the effects of a patriarchal social system. There was rampant wife battering every evening in most homes and the clear division of roles in the households which left women to carry the heavy burden of farm and household chores. This left her with a burning desire to one day change this situation.



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Dr. Baraza began her early education in a local primary school called Chesikaki, a school started and funded by the Friends Church, aka the Quaker Church. Her love for education saw her perform well and proceed to secondary and higher education in which she performed well enough to be admitted to the prestigious University of Nairobi faculty of law to undertake her undergraduate studies in law in 1977. Dr. Baraza never knew that she would end up studying law. She did not even know that such a course existed. It was through her Australian English teacher at her high school who advised her to choose law since it was for 'bright' students. Otherwise, her parents had hoped she would become a teacher like many of her siblings. After joining the faculty of law, she discovered that law was the path that was going to enable her to fight against the patriarchal system that disadvantaged women not just in her village but elsewhere.

In 1981, Dr. Baraza got married but the marriage ended up in a divorce. This left her to bring up her two sons, both of them currently aspiring lawyers. Upon graduation, from the University of Nairobi in 1980, she preceded to the Kenya School of Law for a Diploma in Legal Studies from where she graduated in 1981, leading to her admission to the Roll of Advocates in 1982. In the same year, she joined the law firm of Kilonzo and Company Advocates as a litigation assistant, cutting her teeth in litigation. Later in 1987 she, together with a colleague, formed the law firm of Kioni, Baraza and Company Advocates, the first-ever women law firm in the country. This encouraged other women lawyers to open up law firms in the country. She focused on litigation while her partner attended to commercial and conveyancing work.

Being a litigation lawyer exposed her to the challenges that the Kenyan judiciary faced – delayed cases, corruption, shortage of judges, overworked and outrightly unpleasant judges which became clear to her. She could have enjoyed litigation work had it not been for these challenges, something that made her develop a keen interest in the problems of the judiciary. It is this experience that saw her apply for the post of Deputy Chief Justice of the Republic of Kenya when the post opened up in 2010 upon the enactment of a new Constitution. She wanted to and hoped that she would contribute to the transformation of the judiciary to become more responsive to the needs of litigants and the general citizenry.

Practicing law in the courts exposed Dr. Baraza to the brutal realities of poverty and lack of access to justice for the majority of women who faced issues of maintenance for themselves and their children when their husbands failed to do so.



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It is this reality that forced the women lawyers in Kenya, including Dr. Baraza, to form the Kenyan Chapter of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) to help poor women and their children to access justice. From 1995-1998, she served as the president of FIDA, and today, she is rated as the most effective President that the organization has had. During this period, issues of social, economic, and legal rights of women were brought to the fore in a country that had little recognition for women and was completely unaware of their problems.

Programs such as legal aid and gender-based violence were initiated. FIDA Kenya also acquired international accreditation to UN committees such as the CEDAW Committee. These opportunities saw Dr. Baraza participate in many international conferences such as the 1993 VIENNA Conference that saw women's rights recognized as human rights and the 1999 Beijing Conference which shaped the Beijing Platform for Action, a blueprint for women's empowerment around the world. Dr. Baraza, in conjunction with other women lawyers in Africa and especially from Nigeria, Ghana, and Uganda, helped to set up women lawyers' federations in other countries such as Tanzania, Ethiopia and Zambia purposely to empower women in those countries.

Her desire for social and legal reforms saw Dr. Baraza appointed as a Commissioner of the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC), a body that was mandated to draft a new constitution for the Republic of Kenya after collecting and collating views from Kenyans around the country. Dr. Baraza was privileged to chair the thematic committee on the Bill of Rights. The current Bill of Rights in the Constitution of Kenya, acknowledged as one of the most robust in the world, is owed to this committee. It contains some of the most elaborate rights for women that were unknown in Kenya's constitutional history. In 2007, Dr. Baraza was appointed to serve as the Vice-Chairperson of the Kenya Law Reform Commission, a statutory body that is charged with reviewing and reforming the law in Kenya. During this period, Dr. Baraza succeeded in having major reforms undertaken in marriage law resulting in the enactment of the Marriage Act in 2014. This law has had positive implications for the equality of women in marriage and also for safeguarding the rights of women in polygamous unions (which is a reality in Kenya) who have over the years suffered disadvantage and destitution after the demise of their husbands. She also oversaw the drafting of the Protection Against Domestic Violence Act of 2015, which is a law that recognizes the hitherto unrecognized vice of domestic violence and its impact especially on women, and offers reliefs and sanctions against the vice.



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She also oversaw the drafting of the Matrimonial Property Act enacted in 2013, which safeguards wives' rights in the division of matrimonial property. She also played a pivotal role in the drafting and enactment of the Sexual Offences Act of 2006, a piece of legislation that protects women against sexual violence.

In 2011, Dr. Baraza was appointed the first Deputy Chief Justice of the Republic of Kenya, through a highly competitive public interviewing process. During the period she served in this capacity, she and a team of experts put together the Judiciary Transformation Framework, an integrated and comprehensive framework that targeted strategic institutional reforms that would see an invigorated judiciary that was responsive to the needs of Kenyans. It was launched in 2012 under the leadership of the then Chief Justice, Dr. Willy Mutunga. It led to the massive transformation of the judiciary, including the attraction of funds from the government and the world bank to an institution that had previously been starved of finances. She resigned from this post after a much-publicized security mishap with a security guard at a shopping mall as she rushed to purchase medicine for her son. She argues that part of the attacks she got for the incident were gender-based as indeed other senior members of the government, including the Judiciary itself have committed worse and more heinous offenses but have not suffered her fate.

Dr. Baraza has won several accolades. In 2008, she was awarded the State award of Order of Grand Warrior (OGW) by the President of the Republic of Kenya for her contribution towards humanity. In 2004, she was declared a finalist nominee for the Martin Luther King Junior Award, an award organized under the auspices of the United States of America/Kenya Association then run by the Embassies of the United States of America in African countries for her role in agitating for peaceful change in society. In 2005, she won the FIDA Kenya Award for Outstanding Woman for her contribution towards the empowerment of women. In 2011, she was awarded the Best Achieving Woman award by FIDA Kenya for her success in clinching the hotly contested position of first Deputy Chief Justice of the Republic of Kenya and Vice President of the Supreme Court of Kenya and for setting the bar for women in high positions of governance. Apart from her formal legal work, Dr. Baraza has mentored many young people in schools and social groups and especially women, girl-children, and vulnerable people around the country, something she continues to do.



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Dr. Baraza is without a doubt one of the pioneer women in the legal profession in Kenya as she ventured into the legal field when it was predominantly male-dominated. This pioneering spirit is clearly evident throughout her career as she co-founded the first female-owned law firm in Kenya, participated in the formation of FIDA Kenya, spearheaded and participated in the enactment of various laws especially those that sought to protect the previously ignored rights of women as well as the 2010 Constitution. A remarkable pioneer role is in her becoming the first female Deputy Chief Justice of the Republic of Kenya and the Vice President of the Supreme Court of Kenya. All these just but scratch the surface of the social and political transformation in Kenya that the former Hon. Lady Justice has and still is accomplishing as a frontrunner of women in the legal profession in Kenya.

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Navanethem "Navi" Pillay (South Africa)

Former Judge, International Criminal Court (ICC) ||
International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)

By Jordan Orange

Navanethem (Navi) Pillay was born in South Africa on September 23 1941 to Indian parents of Tamil descent. As a poor Indian South African growing up under apartheid, she faced intersectional layers of hardships and discrimination. This experience eventually fueled much of her professional work. Her father was a bus driver who worked many jobs and her mother stayed home with the children. Education was a priority in her household, and both of her parents were very strict. Pillay's parents believed in raising all their children equally, educating both their sons and daughters, which was uncommon during this time. Despite her parents' efforts, apartheid made pursuing opportunities for upward mobility for racially oppressed people extremely difficult. In an interview, Pillay described her upbringing as harsh, as she was forced to overcome the obstacles apartheid presented. Pillay's parents struggled to provide necessities for their eight children.

After primary school, Pillay became a student in the early 1960s at the University of Natal in South Africa. At the university, she earned both her bachelor's and a law degree. Throughout her time in school, Pillay was active in protests and boycotts against apartheid. After taking some time to practice law, she pursued graduate education and earned a Masters in Law with a concentration in human rights and international law in 1982 from Harvard University. In 1988, she earned a Doctor of Juridical Science degree from Harvard Law School, making her the first South African to earn a doctorate in law from the prestigious institution. Pillay also received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree in May 2015 from Tufts University. Earning degrees from South African and American institutions allowed her to lead a long and impactful career in law.

In 1967, Pillay became the first woman of color to start a law practice in Natal Province, South Africa. Her motivation to become a human rights activist and a defense attorney for those who were fighting against the apartheid system came from her own experience suffering under the oppressive nature of apartheid. Pillay spent over thirty years of her career defending anti-apartheid activists. She began to expose the uses of torture that many anti-apartheid activists experienced in jail. In 1980, she became a lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Around the same time, she became the attorney and conveyancer of the High Court of South Africa.



Navanethem "Navi" Pillay (South Africa)

Former Judge, International Criminal Court (ICC) ||
International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)

By Jordan Orange

Her quest for justice fueled her work in support of both women and minority groups. In 1985, Pillay co-founded the international women's rights group called Equality Now. Pillay served as the Vice-President of the University of Durban Westville starting in 1995. She continued to dedicate her life and career to the education of others. During that same year, apartheid ended, and Pillay was appointed as acting judge on the South African High Court. In 1998, she was elected by the UN General Assembly to be a judge of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. She served in that position for eight years, serving as the president of the tribunal from Pillay achieved transformative reform while working in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

She contributed to jurisprudence on rape as genocide in the case of Prosecutor v. Akayesu, which was critical for women in Rwanda after the genocide. In 2003, she was appointed as a judge to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Pillay served in the Appeals Chamber until August 2008, when she resigned to take the position of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2008. In this role, she fought for human rights and justice on an international level, advocating for people who were deprived of equal rights under the law. Throughout her career, Pillay achieved significant advancements for black people on the continent of Africa and people around the world.

Pillay made significant contributions to the legal field. She paved the way for women all over the world. She was the first woman to start a law practice in Natal Province, South Africa, and the first black woman to serve as a judge on the High Court appointed by President Mandela. She is a trailblazer for many women who may have thought it was impossible to become a judge of a high court or a lawyer in a segregated country. Throughout her career, she fought against systems of racism, discrimination, and hate speech, and fought for justice and human rights for all people.

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Olufolake (Folake) Solanke, SAN (Nigeria)

First Woman Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN)

By Osawaru Iyasere

On the 29th of March 1932, Olufolake (Folake) Solanke was born to the family of Jacob and Sekumade Odulate in Ogun State, Abeokuta, Nigeria. Folake began her primary education in 1937 at Ago Oko Primary School, Abeokuta, she later attended Emo Girls School, Abeokuta from 1940 – 1944. In 1945 she attended Methodist Girls' High School Lagos. She, however, lost her father's sponsorship to college for refusing to marry the man her father had chosen for her (a practice of betrothal which was common at that time), and this experience influenced her advocacy for women's rights. In October 1956, she secretly married her boyfriend from college; Toriola Solanke, a young man who studied Medicine at St. Andrew's University Medical School in Scotland where he obtained his degree in Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery.

In 1950, she took a one-year higher course in Queen's College, Onikan Lagos (as it then was) before proceeding to England where she had her first degree in Durham University (now Newcastle University). She obtained her Bachelor's degree in Latin and Mathematics in 1954. Subsequently, in 1955, she received a diploma certificate in Education. In 1960, Folake proceeded to study law at Gray's Inn, London where she graduated with a degree in law in 1962. Following this, she returned to Nigeria.

Folake's career as a legal practitioner has spanned over four decades. She has received both international and national recognition as a writer and an advocate for women's rights and equality. In August 1962, Folake commenced her legal career in Nigeria at the chambers of late Honorable Justice Michael Adeyinka Odesanya. After her call to the Bar in 1963, she started her law practice full-time at the law chamber of Chief Frederick Rotimi Williams as a junior counsel. She later started her own law firm named "Alabukun Chambers" in 1966. Her legal career was marked with success, as Folake in an interview once affirmed that she has had a 90% success rate in the cases she has handled despite their complexities. Amongst her many achievements, she is most known as the first female Senior Advocate of Nigeria.

Folake Solanke has been the recipient of numerous traditional and national awards. In 1981, she was conferred with a traditional title of "Yeyemofin of Ife" by the late Olubuse II, the 50th Ooni of Ife, following her conferment with Senior Advocate of Nigeria. She has also been awarded the national honor of the Commander of the Order of the Niger (CON).



Olufolake (Folake) Solanke, SAN (Nigeria)

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In 1986, Solanke was called to serve on a tribunal for the review of the sentences of politicians, where she performed a judicial role. She made an indication to serve on the bench at the Supreme Court, but was however invited by the President of the Court of Appeal and was offered a position on the bench, which she declined in order to focus on her activism. Folake played a key role at the Zonta International Organization – an organization whose goal is the empowerment of women through service and advocacy. She contested for the presidency of the organization and was elected as the 42nd president, making her the first African, and non-white to be president of the organization since its establishment in 1919. She paved the way for other Africans to hold international leadership positions in Zonta International Organization, as the 43rd Presidential seat was also held by an African.

As a prolific writer, she has taught and delivered multiple law lectures. In 1998, her public lectures on the "Trial" of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the "trials" of St. Paul, the Apostle received commendations from the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury. In 2012, she was awarded the International Bar Association's Outstanding International Female Lawyer Award at the Association's 5th World Women Lawyers' Conference held in London, as a "recognition of her professional excellence and immense contribution to the advancement of women within the legal profession". Folake is a Life Patron of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (Ibadan branch) and has received the honor of Fellow of The Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies. On January 17, 2015, she was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of the many feats of her career by The Sun Newspaper. Folake Solanke's publications include: A Compendium of Selected Lectures was published, Oral & Written Advocacy: Law & Practice: Traditional & Modern Trends in Advocacy, and most recently, Selected Essays and Papers on Law and Societal Issues.

Folake Solanke, SAN is indeed a pioneer in many fields, of significance are her many achievements in the legal profession. She led and still leads an exemplary lifestyle. To date, Folanke mentors young, and emerging lawyers and continues to contribute her knowledge to the community. Folake's hard work, consistency and excellence exemplify courage and leadership.



Olufolake (Folake) Solanke, SAN (Nigeria)

First Woman Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN)

By Osawaru Iyasere

Beyond her feats as the first female SAN or any other of her many 'firsts,' she has ascended to the pinnacle of her profession defying the odds of being a woman in a male-dominated world. Folake Solanke has undoubtedly paved the way for many women to climb the ranks of both the legal profession and society in general in Nigeria.

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