



African Women Chief Justices



A Digital Archive Series

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WOMEN CHIEF JUSTICES

The ‘African Women Chief Justices’ is a digital archive initiative created to draw attention to a group of phenomenal women, some of whom were the first women in their countries to be elevated to the position of Chief Justice. These volumes are organized in chronological order, from some of the first women appointed to the role to more recent additions.



Mathilda Twomey (Seychelles)

Chief Justice, 2015-2020

Mathilda Twomey was the first woman to preside as Chief Justice over the Supreme Court of the Seychelles. She was appointed to the Supreme Court in 2015 to serve a five-year term. She was born in Mahe, Seychelles and educated at Seychelles College. Due to her diligence, she won a scholarship from the British Council to study law in Europe. She earned her law diploma at the University of Paris-Sud, Sceaux in 1985 and received a BA in both English and French law at the University of Kent at Canterbury in 1986. Shortly afterward, she was called to the Degree of the Utter Bar in Middle Temple, London in 1987 after studying in the Inns of Court School of Law.

After receiving her degrees, Twomey returned to the Seychelles to practice at the Ocean Gate Law Center and the Attorney-General's Chambers. In 1992, she and Pesi Pardiwalla, former Attorney General of the Seychelles, established the law firm Pardiwalla and Twomey to practice private law. She was also a member of the Constitutional Commission which drafted the new Constitution of Seychelles in 1993. Once the new constitution for the Seychelles was established, Twomey moved to Ireland to work in voluntary, community, and disability law. While working professionally, Twomey also attended the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) to receive a Master's in Public Law in 2011.

After receiving her master's, Twomey was appointed as the first female judge in the Seychelles to work on the Court of Appeals. While working on the Court of Appeals, she traveled back and forth from the Seychelles to Ireland to both advance her education at NUIG and act as a lecturer surrounding torts at NUIG. She eventually obtained a PhD in law from NUIG in 2015, the same year she was confirmed as Chief Justice of the Seychelles. She then stepped down from the Supreme Court of the Seychelles in 2020 after her single five-year term was completed.

Read more: <https://www.africanwomeninlaw.com/african-women-in-law/Mathilda-Twomey>



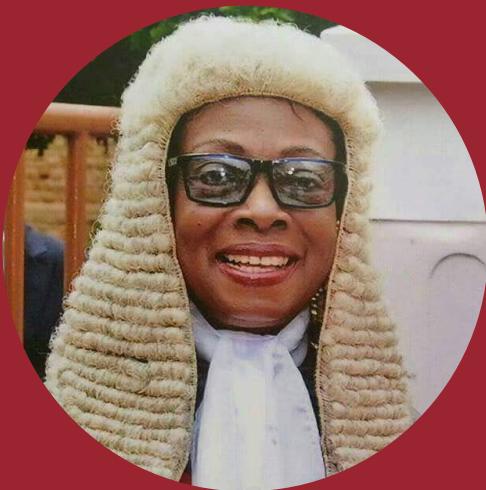
Hildah Chibomba (Zambia)

President, Constitutional Court, 2016-

Hildah Chibomba is the President of the Constitutional Court of Zambia. She holds her Bachelor of Laws from the University of Zambia and received a Master of Laws degree from the University of Bristol. She was admitted to the bar in 1982.

Justice Chibomba started her legal career within the judiciary of Zambia as a Resident Magistrate and Senior Resident Magistrate at Lusaka and Kitwe from 1982 to 1989. She then moved to the Civil Litigation Department within the Ministry of Legal Affairs to be an Assistant Senior State Advocate for the years of 1989 and 1990. Justice Chibomba climbed the ranks of the judiciary in Zambia, becoming the Senior State Advocate in the Civil Litigation Department from 1990 until 1993. Justice Chibomba then left the Ministry of Legal Affairs to work in the Attorney General's chambers from 1993 to 1997 as the Principle State Advocate/Head of the International Law and Agreements. Her next position was to become a Judge of the High Court from 1997 until 2009.

Following her departure from the High Court, Justice Chibomba joined the Supreme Court and became a justice. She was then appointed to the Constitutional Court of Zambia in March 2016. Aside from her work in the judiciary, Justice Chibomba, is a member of the Zambia Association of Women Judges and the International Association of Women Judges.



Sophia Akuffo (Ghana)

Chief Justice, 2017-2019

Sophia Akuffo was the successor to the position of Chief Justice in Ghana after Justice Wood retired. She was appointed to the Chief Justice position in 2017. Justice Akuffo was born in 1949 in Ghana. She received her bachelors in law degree from the University of Ghana, following which she attended the Ghana School of Law from which she obtained her qualification as a barrister in Ghana, and was called to the Ghanaian Bar in 1975. She also has a master's degree in law (LL.M) from Harvard University.

Sophia Akuffo was originally appointed to the Supreme Court of Ghana by former Court President Rawlings in 1995 and served on the court successively until her appointment as Chief Justice. She is the longest-serving Supreme Court Judge in Ghana. She was nominated to the Chief Justice position in 2017 by President Nana Akufo-Addo, approved of by Parliament, and sworn into the role by the President Nana Akufo-Addo.

Additionally, Sophia Akuffo became one of the first judges for the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2006. She was re-elected after her 2-year term for an additional 6 years. During this period, she served as the Vice-President of the Court for four years and the President for 2 years before she left the African Court in 2014. Besides working on the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the former Chief Justice was a member of the Disciplinary Committee of the General Legal Council and a member of the Committee of the Commonwealth Judicial Education Institute.

Lady Justice Akuffo retired from the position of Chief Justice in 2019 on the eve of her 70th birthday, as this is the statutory retirement age for Supreme Court judges in Ghana. Since her retirement, she was appointed as chair for the COVID-19 fund by President Nana Akufo-Addo. The Fund was created in order to receive donations from the public to benefit those vulnerable due to COVID-19.



Danielle Darlan (Central African Republic)

President of the Constitutional Court , 2017-

Danielle Darlan is the first woman to lead a governmental institution in the Central African Republic. She was elected by the other nine members of the Constitutional Court in 2017 and is still fulfilling her seven-year, nonrenewable term as President of the Constitutional Court.

Previously, Ms. Darlan was a professor teaching and researching public law at the University of Bangui, which she has been doing since 1982. Additionally, in the past, Ms. Darlan operated as a private lawyer defending her clients in the Central African Republic from 1995 to 2003 and working in the Department of National Education in the minister's coordination office from 1986 to 1990. She was educated at the Universite de Perpignan Via Domitia in 1971-1975, where she received her master's in public law and attended Universite de Provence-Aix-Marseille to receive her Juris doctorate degree from 1975-1978.

Her most recent case regarded the postponement of a national election for the President of the Central African Republic due to the coronavirus. She affirmed the constitution and that the reform mandate proposed by the President to allow him to remain in office for a longer period was unlawful.



Meaza Ashenafi (Ethiopia)

President of the Federal Supreme Court, 2018-

Meaza Ashenafi is Ethiopia's first female President of the Federal Supreme Court, appointed by the Prime Minister of Ethiopia in November 2018. She was born in the Asosa zone in the Beninshangul-Gumuz region of Ethiopia in 1964. She was educated at Addis Ababa University, where she received her Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.), and then went on to receive a master's degree in international relations and gender studies from the University of Connecticut.

Following her graduation with her master's, Ashenafi served as a Judge of the High Court of Ethiopia from 1989 to 1992. She also served as a legal adviser for the Ethiopian Constitution Commission in 1993. In 1995, Ashenafi founded the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA). She became the executive director for the association and used the organization to campaign for women's rights in Ethiopia, to contribute to legal reform, and to provide legal aid to impoverished women. Through the development of EWLA, Ashenafi represented a teenaged girl who killed her kidnapper who was attempting to force the girl into a marriage in 1997. By winning the case, she directly challenged the country's laws surrounding forced marriage.

Ashenafi became an adviser for gender and women's rights at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in the Capacity Development Division in 2011 and continues to provide a conceptual analysis of how to best protect women's rights throughout Africa. Additionally, Ashenafi assisted with the founding of the first women's bank in Ethiopia, Enat Bank, which was established in 2011, and on which she chairs the board of directors as of 2016. This previous history of advocating for gender reform and operating in the legal arena in Ethiopia enabled Ashenafi to be appointed by the new prime minister of Ethiopia to become the President of the Federal Supreme Court.

Read more: <https://www.africanwomeninlaw.com/african-women-in-law/Meaza-Ashenafi>



Lúcia da Luz Ribeiro (Mozambique)

President, Constitutional Court, 2019-

Lucia da Luz Ribeiro was born in 1963 in Maputo, Mozambique. Initially, Ribeiro received her Portuguese Language Teacher certification from the Faculty of Education of Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM) in 1984. Ribeiro returned to school to obtain her law degree from UEM in 1994. Ribeiro also attended the Polytechnic University of Madrid to obtain her master's in business law. She then trained in Legal Counseling for Companies at the Polytechnic University of Madrid.

Following her attainment of a law degree, she began serving as a professor at UEM and has continued to do so since 1994. Additionally, she became a legal advisor for the Minister of Public Works and Housing, a role she filled from 1995 until 2003. Ribeiro served as a founding member of the Bar Association of Mozambique.

In 2003, Ribeiro became the President of the Jurisdictional Council of the Mozambican Bar Association. She then became the Director of the Faculty of Law at UEM from 2003 to 2004. She began her tenure as a judge on the Constitutional Court in 2003. Additionally, she is a member of the Women's Law and Development Association, the Mozambican Association of Women in Legal Careers, and the Child, Family, and Development organization. She has concurrently been an associate researcher at Women and Law in Southern Africa and operated as a legal advisor for both government and private institutions in Mozambique.

She was elected as the President of the Constitutional Court in Mozambique in 2019 and currently serves in this position. Additionally, she received her PhD in law from the Faculty of Law of UEM in 2019.



Nemat Abdullah Khair (Sudan)

Chief Justice, 2019-

Nemat Abdullah Khair is the Chief Justice for the Supreme Court of Sudan who serves as the head of the Sudanese judiciary. She is the first woman to serve as the Chief Justice for Sudan.

She is originally from the state of Gezira in Sudan and was born in 1957. For her education, Khair went to Cairo University to receive a Bachelors in Law. Following her graduation, she became a member of the Sudanese judiciary in the 1980s. She worked in the Court of Appeals and the Court of First Instance in Sudan before joining the Supreme Court. She is also the founder of the Sudanese Judges Club.

Khair was confirmed as the Chief Justice of Sudan in October 2019 after being selected by the Transitional Military Council and the Forces of Freedom and Change alliance.



Mabel Agyemang (Turks and Caicos)

Chief Justice, 2020-

Mabel Agyemang has had an illustrious career in the judiciary within three Commonwealth jurisdictions working as a superior court judge. Mabel Agyemang received her undergraduate degree at the University of Ghana and attended the Ghana School of Law. Immediately following her graduation, Agyemang was called to the Ghanaian bar in 1987. She entered private legal practice from 1987 to 1991 before joining the judiciary of Ghana, where she worked in the judicial circuit and served in many different jurisdictions during her tenure.

In 1996, Agyemang became the Vice President of the Association of Magistrates and Judges of Ghana, which she continued to serve in until 2000. It was in 2002 that Agyemang was elevated to the High Court in Ghana. She left her position in the Ghanaian court system to work for the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Commonwealth Secretariat is an association of 54 different countries originally rooted in the British Empire. Its mission is to support member countries to enable collaboration for global challenges including, those of civil and criminal justice reform. It is in this area of the Commonwealth that Agyemang worked as an expert to the judiciaries of The Gambia and Swaziland as a High Court Judge from 2004 until 2014.

In 2013, Agyemang was appointed to become the first woman Chief Justice of The Gambia, though she was only able to fill the position for a year until 2014. In 2014, she left The Gambia after the President of The Gambia unlawfully terminated her services because Agyemang was attempting to reform the judicial system. She returned to her native Ghana after this removal and was sworn in as a Justice of the Court of Appeals until 2020.

In April 2020, she was appointed by the Governor of the Turks and Caicos Islands to become the Chief Justice of the Turks of Caicos Islands, a position to which she is bringing her years of experience in the judicial field.



Martha Koome (Kenya)

Chief Justice, 2021-

Martha Koome was born in Kithiu village, Meru County, Kenya in 1960. Her parents were peasant farmers. She received her LLB from the University of Nairobi, Kenya, and attended the Kenya School of Law in 1987, where she graduated with distinction and was then called to the bar. She received her LL.M in Public International Law from the University of London in 2010.

Koome's career began at Mathenge and Muchemi Advocates as a legal associate. She soon opened a law firm that became one of Kenya's most successful women's law firms. As an astute lawyer, she represented and defended persons charged with politically instigated offenses during the one-party rule of President Daniel Arap Moi in Kenya.

Koome was appointed as a Commissioner to the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of Children by the African Union Heads of States in 1995. Additionally, she served as Chairperson of the National Council on the Administration of Justice special task force on children matters and led discussions on the review of the Children's Act.

In 2003, President Mwai Kibaki appointed Koome as a judge of the High Court, where she headed the family, environmental, and land division for eight years. During her active years as a High Court Judge, she also sat in satellite courts to clear a backlog of cases. Her excellence and hard work earned her an appointment as a Court of Appeal judge in 2012, the same year she was elected as the Chairperson of the Kenya Magistrates and Judges Association.

On April 14, 2021, Koome was shortlisted and interviewed publicly for the position of Chief Justice. She demonstrated a deep understanding of legal and social issues and proved to be a formidable candidate for the role. After being presented with her name, the President referred her to the Kenyan Parliament for vetting and approval. On May 19, 2021, the Parliament approved of her appointment and President Uhuru Kenyatta appointed her Chief Justice, making her the first woman to become a Chief Justice in Kenya.



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