



# Pioneer African Women in Law

## A Digital Archive Series (Vol. 1)



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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



## Akua Kuenyehia (Ghana)

Retired Judge, International Criminal Court

By Nancy Henaku

Akua Kuenyehia is an eminent Ghanaian lawyer, academic, and human rights advocate whose impact on legal practice and education is evident at both the national and international levels. She was born on January 1, 1947, in Akropong, a town in the Eastern Region of Southern Ghana. Prior to her legal education, Kuenyehia attended the prestigious Achimota Secondary School in Accra, Ghana. She went on to attend the University of Ghana where she graduated with a Bachelor of Law degree (LLB, Second Class Upper Division) at the Faculty of Law in 1969. In 1970, she obtained a professional diploma and was subsequently admitted to the Ghana Bar in 1971. She then proceeded to Somerville College, Oxford University where she completed a Bachelor of Civil Law (BCL) in 1972. In 1972, Kuenyehia began her academic life as a lecturer at the Faculty of Law in the University of Ghana— an appointment that made her Ghana's first woman law professor. In that same year, she began a lectureship position at the Ghana Workers College. Kuenyehia has made immense contributions to legal knowledge especially as it pertains to Ghanaian and African contexts; actively engaged with several organizations; contributed to socio-political discourse at the level of the Ghanaian nation-state; and occupied several important positions, all of which have made her a legal luminary in Ghana and beyond.

At the University of Ghana Faculty of Law, Kuenyehia rose to become a senior lecturer in 1985 and an associate professor in 1996. In 1996, she became the first woman to be appointed as Dean of the Faculty of Law, a position she occupied until 2003. In her position as Dean, Kuenyehia played a crucial role in laying the foundation for the establishment of a faculty exchange program between the University of Ghana Faculty of Law and the Northwestern University School of Law. The program, which concentrated on the legal status of West African women, was meant to “lead not only to new courses in Ghana but also to a number of reform efforts, such as collaboration on drafting a separate domestic violence code.” In 2001, she became the acting director of the Ghana School of Law. In 2013, she was inducted as the President of Mountcrest University College, a private university in Accra, Ghana. Kuenyehia has also occupied visiting academic positions in institutions outside Ghana, including Temple University, Imo State University, Northwestern University, Leiden University, and the University of Pennsylvania. She has taught a range of courses including Public International Law, International Human Rights Law, Criminal Law, Women and Law, Contracts, Labor Law, and Health Law.





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Her research is mainly focused on human rights, international law, and gender. Significantly, Kuenyehia's work is regarded as part of the pioneering work on women and the law in Africa. Besides several articles on the subject of women and law especially (e.g., Women and Family Law in Ghana: An appraisal of property rights of married women; Distribution of Matrimonial Property on Dissolution of Marriage-A Reappraisal), Kuenyehia is also the editor of the books Women & Law in West Africa: Situational Analysis of Some Key Issues Affecting Women as well as Women and Law in West Africa: Gender Relations in the Family. She is also the co-author of Women and Law in Sub-Saharan Africa (with Cynthia Grant Bowman) as well as co-editor for International Courts and the African Woman Judge: Unveiled Narratives (with Dr. Josephine Jarpa Dawuni). She has spoken on a range of topics related to her research and career. At the 23rd Brigitte M. Bodenheimer annual Lecture on the Family at the School of Law in the University of California, Davis she spoke on the subject "Women, Marriage, and Intestate Succession in the Context of Legal Pluralism in Africa." While Kuenyehia's research suggests a significant expertise on women and gender issues, it is also important not to pigeonhole her scholarship for as she indicates, in response to questions for an application to the International Criminal Court (ICC): "I have legal expertise that goes far beyond violence against women and children."

Kuenyehia's legal education and career have been marked by all kinds of achievements, beginning in 1970 when she received the Mensah Sarbah Award for being the best student in Professional Law. In 1991, she received a Commonwealth Foundation Fellowship for distinguished scholarship. She was also a member of the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The highlight of Kuenyehia's legal career is her pioneering role in the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, where she served as a judge from 2003 to 2015. Not only was she one of the eighteen judges elected by the Assembly of State Parties (ASP), she was also one of three African women elected to the ICC at its initial formation. She also became the first vice president of the ICC from 2003 to 2009, playing a pivotal administrative role during the formative stages of the court. In a post-appointment interview, Kuenyehia indicated: "For me, my election to this high office is a culmination of all the work I have done over the years, whether as an academic or as an activist. I also see it as a big opportunity to put all I have written about to good use." This suggests that praxis is a crucial component of Kuenyehia's legal career.



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Kuenyehia's experiences at the ICC have been crucial to much of her recent scholarship. In 2017, she was a speaker for the 36th Viscount Bennett Lecture at the University of New Brunswick's faculty of law on the subject "Justice in a Conflicted World: Reflections from Judge Kuenyehia of the International Criminal Court." In 2015, in her position as an international visiting scholar at the University of Pennsylvania, Kuenyehia taught a three-week course titled "The ICC from the Perspective of an Appellate Judge." Additionally, she was one of the prominent African lawyers to speak at a session focusing on "International Justice in Africa" at the International Bar Association Conference in Madrid in 2009. While at the University of Pennsylvania, Kuenyehia spoke on the topic "The Challenges Facing the ICC: The Africa Question." Her discourse engaged African critiques of the International Criminal Court, calling into question suggestions that the ICC was a "neocolonialist Western organization lording it over poor African countries." She argued that "the court doesn't target anyone" and that "the fact that the court is operating in Africa is a result of a sovereign will...by each of those governments." For her, the ICC's work on African cases is "an attempt by Africa to put its house in order." Kuenyehia's rhetoric about the ICC provides insight into the complex negotiations of postcolonial agents, whether as judges or nation-states, within transnational jurisprudence.

Kuenyehia is affiliated with several organizations including, the Ghana Bar Association, International Bar Association, International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA)—of which she served as president from 1986 to 1989, the Women, Law, and Development Institute—of which she served as a board member from 1993, Institute for African Women in Law—of which she was a founding board member from 2016 to 2020, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF)—of which she is a founding member and was a board member from 1991 to 1998, International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development—of which she served as a board member from 1993 to 1997, Society for International Development, Ghana Association of Consultants, the African Association of International and Comparative Law.

Kuenyehia's work extends beyond academe and legal practice. At the international level, she has worked in several capacities with organizations such as the United Nations and African Union. For instance, she worked with NGOs during the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. In her response to questionnaires for her ICC application, she explains that her role was to make sure "the Final document adopted recognized women's rights as human rights."





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She also worked with the UN to report on State Party negotiations relating to the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). At the African Union level, she contributed in various ways to the drafting of the Additional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of women. This was to ensure "that the document is responsive to the needs of African women". She also brought her experience on gender to the ICC. She, together with the second vice president of the ICC, organized "gender training" for judges in 2004 "to help [them] appreciate their gender responsibilities under the Rome Statute." At the national level, Kuenyehia also contributed in several capacities. For instance, she helped with the establishment of the first Ghanaian legal aid center for grassroots women. She also conducted research that was central to legislation on violence against women in Ghana. In an interview, she explains: "I remember many years ago, when we started talking about violence against women. I was confronted by a high government official who said "Tell me...the number of women who are beaten in their homes. And I said, "give me time. I'll tell." So we set up an institution. We did a national research throughout the country in collaboration with the police, social services...we collaborated with the whole of society...and we came up... that three out of ten women on the average are beaten by...that was the genesis of the legislation on the violence against women that came up and since then a lot has been done...there is the special unit, the DOVVSU and all that." (TV3 Network).

She has been recognized both locally and internationally for her numerous contributions to the field of law. In 2003, she received an Honorary Meritorious Service Award from the University of Ghana. In 2013, the Faculty of Law building at the University of Ghana was named after her and John Evans Atta-Mills, Ghana's former president who was also a law professor. Plans for the building began with Kuenyehia who helped source funds for the building when she was dean of the faculty. Her children created, "in her honor", the Akua Kuenyehia Foundation, an organization that focuses on the "development and empowerment" of Ghanaian women." She has also been recognized as "an inspiring lawyer" by the London South Bank University. In 2016, she was a recipient of an honorary degree for "distinguished international leadership and statesmanship" from the University of Ghana, and in 2017, she was a recipient of the African Genius Award (Leadership category). She is an honorary fellow of Somerville College, Oxford University. She is the subject of Nkiru Nzegwu's "Judge Akua Kuenyehia: First Vice President" and Josephine Jarpa Dawuni's "Akua Kuenyehia: Leaving a Mark Along the Journey for Human Rights."



# Akua Kuenyehia (Ghana)

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Kuenyehia is undoubtedly a pioneer in legal studies and practice and this is not merely because of the novelty of her “first woman” role in many positions. She is a pioneer for also actively working to ensure that African (and female) perspectives and concerns are central to contemporary law. Even more important is her effort to bring the law home—to make it meaningful to people’s material experiences.

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## Alice Nkom (Cameroon)

Human Rights Lawyer

By Shiri Asangwe

Alice Nkom was born on January 14th, 1945 in Poutkak, Cameroon, fifteen years before Cameroon became an independent nation in 1960, declaring independence from the colonial chains of the French and British. Alice Nkom would grow up in what is still considered Francophone Cameroon, as the country is divided into ten regions, eight of which are ruled by French colonial customs and ruling, while two are ruled by British customs. Cameroon's first elected president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, established and set the foundation on which the country's laws and code of conduct would follow. Hence, later in her life, Alice Nkom addresses these problematic laws and ideologies that detrimentally permeate the public and social lives of LGBTIQ individuals living in Cameroon. Though before this, Alice Nkom pursued her higher education in France at the University of Toulouse (1963-1964) and completed her studies at the Federal University of Cameroon (1968). Amongst her extensive achievements, Alice Nkom broke barriers at the age of 24 when she became Cameroon's first female attorney. Her stride into this overtly male-dominated profession, especially in Cameroon, continues to inspire and motivate generations of women lawyers in the country and on the continent.

Being the first of anything can be a bit daunting whether the title was intentional or unintentional. In the case of Alice Nkom, she has carried the responsibility of that title with grace, humility, and immense devotion to her work and the people of Cameroon. Nkom's time as a budding lawyer was filled with defending "low income and vulnerable people, including political prisoners, street children, and women. Since 1979, she has been a stakeholder in one of the most prestigious law firms in Cameroon." This information is significant as it showcases how impressive and Alice Nkom has always been, yet the pivot in the trajectory of her career and ultimate purpose for her life did not reveal itself until almost 34 years later. In 2003, "a chance meeting with some young gay Cameroonian men who had been living in Paris opened up her eyes to the human rights abuse the LGBT community was facing in her native country." This unplanned discourse lit a fire in Nkom and from there she began to recognize and analyze how LGBTIQ individuals were being lawfully persecuted in Cameroon.

As the diligent and reputable lawyer that she is, Alice Nkom looked first to the laws that both defended human rights yet condemned and criminalized the rights of homosexuals. When examining the Cameroon Penal Code and coming across Article 347, it is clear that the country criminalizes sexual relations with a person of the same sex for up to five years in prison and possibly a fine.



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Nkom realized the uncertainty and fear of exposure these individuals felt in the country and thus used her resources to establish the Association for the Defense of Homosexuality (ADEFHO) in 2003 “to work towards the decriminalization of homosexuality.” One of the main components of her arguments when defending individuals who have been imprisoned for being presumably homosexual and when engaging with other leaders about Cameroon’s homophobia is that it is more so the acts of homosexuality that are being criminalized and in need of remedy, not the identity component of being homosexual. Essentially, “being homosexual is not a crime, however a ‘provision’ was added into the law in 1972 making homosexual acts illegal. Nkom uses this awareness of the more superior law – the original constitution – to get people out of jail.”

Moreover, one of the major strides in this struggle that has garnered Alice Nkom and her NGO attention is her defense for Roger Jean-Claude Mbédé. He was convicted in 2011 of alleged homosexual conduct after he sent a text to another man stating, “I am very much in love with you.” Nkom appealed his case to the Supreme Court, despite his untimely death in 2013. Additionally, Nkom defended two men who were convicted in 2012 based on their appearance and their drinking of Bailey’s Irish Cream; this highlights how ambiguously bigoted the laws and reasoning for condemnation are in Cameroon. This is the fight Alice Nkom has dedicated her life to. It is prudent to note the adversity in her finances, safety, dignity, and more that she has had to overcome as a result of this struggle. Nkom writes, “I receive constant death threats and any volunteers who work for me soon have to stop because they too receive death threats and find themselves ostracized by society...the government has made it as hard as possible for me to apply for international support...I am the only person providing legal counsel for these people. I do this work full time now but cannot simply defend them all.”

Albeit the intensity of Alice Nkom’s plight for justice, her efforts have been recognized and are impacting people all across the world. She received the German branch of Amnesty International award in March 2014. Additionally, she received EU funding in 2010 for a total of £300,000. Despite the ample uphill battles that Alice Nkom faces and runs after, she is an extraordinary pioneer of LGBTIQ advocacy. She has identified an area in her society that needs change and someone to lead that change. Through her assiduous character, she became the first female attorney in Cameroon and exceeded all expectations as a first. Alice Nkom has laid the foundation and earnestly campaigned for a just and promising world for all people, regardless of sexual orientation.





# Alice Nkom (Cameroon)

Human Rights Lawyer

By Shiri Asangwe

Her work deserves praise and she has added more value and integrity to the field of law, all whilst remaining firm in her identity as a Cameroonian woman with all the grit and grace this world has to offer.

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## Aloma Mariam Mukhtar (Nigeria)

First Woman Chief Justice (Nigeria)

By Sabrina Newton

Aloma Mariam Mukhtar is a distinguished Nigerian jurist and pioneer who has championed human rights, justice, and gender parity through the legal profession with diligence and excellence. Mukhtar was born on November 20th, 1944, in Lagos, Nigeria to Muktari Mukhtar and Hadiza Mukhtar. She attended Saint George's Primary School in Zaria, Nigeria, before completing her primary education at the St. Bartholomew School in 1957. Aloma later relocated to Somerset, England to obtain her General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary level certificates from the Rossholme School for girls in 1962. Aloma often referred to her time at the Rossholme school as transformative, mentioning the difficulty that came with being the only African student at her school during her tenure. This, however, will not be the sole instance of Aloma breaking barriers.

Aloma later pursued higher education at the Reading Technical College in Berkshire, England, initially intrigued by nursing and library studies, but later became increasingly interested in law. It is said that after being teased by her male friends that she should pursue the legal profession, she took this challenge head-on and would go on to study Law at Gibson and Weldon College of Law, England. Mukhtar was later called to the English Bar in absentia in the year 1966 and thereafter, the Nigerian Bar in 1967.

Upon entry to the Nigeria Bar in 1967, Aloma began her career as Pupil State Counsel at the Ministry of Justice in Northern Nigeria. This feat would make Aloma Mukhtar the first female attorney to serve across the nineteen (19) states of Northern Nigeria. Four years after her call to the Nigerian bar, Aloma transitioned to the Ministry of Justice, working as a legal counsel for the state. During her tenure at the Ministry, Aloma was tapped by the Late Alhaji Buba Ardo to serve as an interim magistrate to rectify the backlog of cases in Maiduguri. This would make Aloma the first woman to be appointed as a Magistrate in the Northern States of Nigeria, a post she excelled in until 1973 before serving as a Chief Registrar at the Kano State Government Judiciary.

In 1977, Aloma Mukhtar was appointed a judge for the Kano State High Court. This appointment made Aloma Mukhtar the third woman to serve as a judge in the history of Nigeria, the first woman to serve as a judge in the Northern part of Nigeria, and the youngest judge in the country during that period at thirty-two years of age.





## Aloma Mariam Mukhtar (Nigeria)

First Woman Chief Justice (Nigeria)

By Sabrina Newton

A decade later in 1987, Mukhtar was appointed a Justice of the Court of Appeal, making her the first woman in this position. She served at the Court of Appeal until 2005, before being appointed as a Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria from 2005 to 2014, making her the first woman to serve in the highest court of Nigeria. During her tenure on the Supreme Court of Nigeria, Mukhtar also served as a Justice of the Supreme Court of The Gambia from 2011 until 2012.

On July 16th, 2012, Aloma Mukhtar was sworn in as the first woman Chief Justice of Nigeria by the then serving President of Nigeria Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who conferred on her the National Honour of the Grand Commander of the Order of Niger (GCON). A woman of unfaltering courage and admirable tenacity, Aloma Mukhtar has contributed tirelessly to the advancement of justice and the rule of law in Nigeria. She has served as the Vice president of the National Association of Female Judges in Nigeria and has been honored for contributions to gender parity and justice. In 2005, Mukhtar was inducted into the Nigerian Hall of fame, before receiving the National honor of the Grand Commander of the Order of Niger in 2012, as well as the Gold Merit Award for her contributions to the development of law in Kano State in 2016.

Described as 'incorruptible' Aloma is known for her integrity and impartiality. In her capacity as Chief Justice, she launched investigations into corrupt members of the justice system, holding those found guilty accountable for their actions; notably stating "Corruption is in every system of our society and I cannot pretend that it is not in the judiciary. I will encourage internal cleansing based on petition and as much as possible ensure that bad eggs are removed so that the confidence reposed in the judiciary will be restored once again." This is indeed the legacy of her tenure on the bench, rooting out frivolous petitions, corruption, and streamlining the delivery of justice in Nigeria.

Aloma Mukhtar is regarded by her colleagues as fair-minded, impartial, bold and effective, yet gracious, humble, and kind. Many people who pave the way for others through being 'firsts' don't initially set out on a path to be 'first,' they merely work diligently and industriously at a craft they love. Few individuals are more befitting of this title than Aloma Mukhtar—a pioneer, a trailblazer, and a phenomenal woman.



# Aloma Mariam Mukhtar (Nigeria)

First Woman Chief Justice (Nigeria)

By Sabrina Newton

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## Aloysie Cyanzayire (Rwanda)

First Woman Chief Justice (Rwanda)

By Stephen Muthoka Mutie, Ph.D.

In a country where nearly half of all members of parliament are women and with many women achieving greater recognition and visibility in various socioeconomic fields, being a Supreme Court Justice may seem readily attainable for a woman. However, what Justice Aloysie Cyanzayire achieved in the justice system in Rwanda from 2003 to 2011 has left a mark in women's history and what women can achieve, especially in East Africa. Born on February 11, 1964, Cyanzayire is an eminent judge who presided over the Rwandan Supreme Court. She is the eldest child in a Christian family of eight with hardworking parents who pushed her to work hard with diligence and endurance. She succeeded in school in an era when access to education for girls was difficult.

Cyanzayire performed well in school and originally wished to pursue economic studies; instead, at the end of high school in 1983, she decided to study Law and graduated in 1989 with a Bachelor's Degree in Law from the National University of Rwanda. Her motivation to study law came from her admiration of the judges she saw during her internship at the Court of Cassation in her first year of license. At that time, she saw few women in the profession and never thought she could enter the judiciary herself. Studying law was not particularly challenging for Cyanzayire. However, women faced particular challenges while attending law school. First, very few women were enrolled in the faculty of law due to the limited number of secondary schools offering university access for women. Second, the areas of study for women were limited; most schools were oriented towards professions like secretaries, teachers, nurses, social workers with only one scientific school for girls.

In 1990, Cyanzayire began an outstanding career in the judiciary when she was appointed Judge of the Court of First Instance. At the time, only 1% of the judiciary consisted of women judges. Propelled by the desire to dispense justice to the aggrieved people, she found her true love in working as a judge. After one year of work, she passed a competition to enter the National School of Magistrates, International Section, in Paris, where she spent two academic years from 1991 to 1993. She received her post-graduate diploma in judicial matters, allowing her to enter into the category of professional judges. Her interaction with experienced judges increased her love and appreciation of her work.



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Cyanzayire's legal career has been by many achievements. She served many roles in the Ministry of Justice, first as Director of Public Prosecutions and relations with the Judicial Services, then as Director of Legal Drafting, and finally as Secretary-General of the Ministry. She assumed these functions from 1995 to 2000, just after the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. At the time, the judicial and political structures had to be rebuilt from scratch. The main task was to put the Judicial System back in service by quickly recruiting and training judges and judicial staff to restart the activities of the Courts and Tribunals.

In her role as the Director of Legal drafting, she initiated and drafted laws that allowed for the trial of genocide suspects. She also worked for the reconstruction of Rwanda, including actions such as the abolition of discriminatory laws against women and in the drafting of laws allowing women to have the right to succeed as men, and the mobilization of women to enter the judiciary. As the Secretary-General, Cyanzayire coordinated and supervised all the technical work of the Ministry with precision.

Cyanzayire's work as Vice President of the Supreme Court and President of the Gacaca Jurisdictions Department from 2000 to 2003 was instrumental in shaping not only the justice system in Rwanda but also the country's entire socioeconomic spectrum. The Department of Gacaca jurisdictions (also called 6th Chamber), was one of the Departments created within the Supreme Court with a mission to organize the establishment and operation of Gacaca Courts across the country to try perpetrators of the genocide against the Tutsis.

Due to Cyanzayire's focused and visionary leadership as Chief Justice from 2003 to 2011, she oversaw the implementation of the reforms of the judicial system in Rwanda. Under her leadership, she implemented the findings of an ad hoc Commission which redesigned the legislation outlining the judiciary which ultimately required a deep reform of the judicial system. These reforms have permitted a professionalization of the Rwandan judicial system by allowing only lawyers to take on judicial positions, contrary to the previous rules which allowed non-lawyers as well to take the position. These reforms also modernized the system by improving infrastructure, equipment, and new information technologies used in the judicial system.





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Cyanzayire also played an important role in the fight against injustice and corruption when she served as the first woman to hold the Office of the Ombudsman starting in June 2012 through August 2017. She proposed and implemented anti-corruption strategies and coordinated investigation and prosecution of corruption and related offenses by managing complaints from citizens.

She advised the government and other public and private institutions to strengthen and improve their policy of prevention and fighting corruption. Her work strengthened good governance in all institutions. She highlighted the weaknesses of the operations and followed up on the implementation of the code of ethics of politicians and leaders.

Cyanzayire overcame many challenges on her road to success and gallantly triumphed over those that fate threw on her path. She first faced challenges in ensuring that as a judge she ruled not only according to the law but with results that produced justice as well. She noted that law and justice were two different things and one could apply the law but fail to do justice. A judge is often in front of people who hide the truth from them, so she took time to weigh her decision and search for the truth. Cyanzayire applied the law and relied on the wisdom of God who always guided her and she considered the consequences of her decisions.

The biggest challenge Cyanzayire faced was rebuilding the destroyed judicial system after the 1994 Genocide with very limited human and material resources. Cyanzayire admitted that it was not easy to combine work, family, and social life while maintaining a successful professional career. She made sacrifices to her family to move her country forward, and she had a husband who understood the demands of her job and did his best to support her at home.

Alongside this illustrious career in the judiciary, Cyanzayire also served on various committees including the African Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities; the Association of Institutions responsible for the fight against corruption in African countries members of the Commonwealth; and the National Advisory Council.



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Cyanzayire has also been recognized for her various contributions to the field of law. She received a Recognition Certificate by Women Leaders Network in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion for her work as Chief Justice; an Appreciation Award by the East African Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities for her service as Vice-Chairperson of the Association; and an Appreciation Award from the Rwandan Association of Judges and Magistrates for her service as Chief Justice.

Cyanzayire has made a remarkable impact in the Rwandan legal fraternity and has led an illustrious professional career as a leader, judge, civil servant, wife, and mother. Her visionary leadership has and continues to shine a light for many women not only in Rwanda but also in the East African region.

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## Amina Mouso Ouédraogo Traoré (Burkina Faso)

First Woman Vice President of the Supreme Court

By Khoudia Leye.

Aminata Mouso Ouedraogo was born on June 12, 1948, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. After her primary education, she enrolled in Lycée Philippe Zinder Kaboré, where she successfully passed both her Ordinary (O) Levels (1966), and subsequently Advanced (A) Level (1969) examinations. Her academic brilliance won her a scholarship for further studies at Université-Aix- en Provence in France, where she earned both her Bachelor's degree in Law ( 1976) and a Master's degree (1977).

Upon completing her graduate studies, Aminata returned home to assume important positions in the judiciary. She joined the Regional Court of Ouagadougou as a Deputy Public Prosecutor in 1979. She gradually climbed the ladder to become a member of the constitutional Court from 1991 to 1992 and the Attorney General of the Court of Auditors from 2002 to 2005. In April 2005, she became the first female and the third individual after Tiémoko Marc Garango and Jean Baptiste Kafando to assume the prestigious position of the Ombudsperson of Burkina Faso, a position held in high esteem which represents a tremendous honor for the individual that holds it.

The extensive experience Aminata acquired during the many years of her legal profession honed her skills to become a leading advocate for women's rights in the country. and also known for her passion for gender equality and children's rights. With regards to her passion for women's rights, she is attributed with having been instrumental in the establishment of the WILDALF's office in Burkina Faso, to aid the fight against the violation of women's rights; promotion of women's empowerment, and enhancement of their participation on issues that affect their lives. As one of the first female legal scholars, she spearheaded the founding of the Association of Women Lawyers of Burkina Faso (AFJ/BF), becoming the Association's Vice President and later assuming the presidency from 2003 to 2006. In the same vein, Aminata led a host of programs to advocate for the protection of vulnerable groups in Burkina Faso. This includes, among others, the sponsorship of the "Because I am a girl" campaign for girls initiated by PLAN Burkina in 2012.

Aminata Mouso is an award-winning pioneer, a passionate supporter of justice and, a voice of the voiceless. In 2008, she was elected General Secretary of the Association of Ombudsmen of UEMOA's Member States in West Africa (AMP-UEMOA).



## Amina Mouso Ouédraogo Traoré (Burkina Faso)

First Woman Vice President of the Supreme Court

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She has received several awards in Burkina Faso, and on December 26, 2011, she was elevated to the rank of Officer in the National Order of Merit for her dedication and faithful services to the nation. In a nutshell, Amina Mouso Ouedraogo is a woman of character and a well-respected legal expert in Burkina Faso.

Even though currently on retirement, she is still active in civil society issues and continues to serve on the Board of Autorite Supérieur de controle d'état et de Lutte Contre la Corruption (ASCE-LC), a Higher State Supervision and Anti-Corruption, the supreme body responsible for conducting internal administrative audits and tackling corruption in Burkina Faso. Aminata Mouso Ouedraogo is happily married to Ali Ouedraogo, Professor of gynecology, at Université Ki Zerbo of Ouagadougou. The couple is blessed with two sons.

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## Anastasia Msosa (Malawi)

First Woman Chief Justice (Malawi)

By Taylor Duncan

Anastasia Msosa is known for being the first female Chief Justice of Malawi. This enormous endeavor, however, is not the only example of her ambition and strength. Justice Anastasia Msosa has spent both her academic and political career challenging societal norms and a heavily male-dominated field. Not only this, but Msosa helped to introduce a multiparty democratic political system to her nation. Anastasia Msosa is a pioneer in her field and serves as an inspiration to all women in male-driven work environments and striving to make an impact in their community.

Born in a rural village in Dedza in 1950, Anastasia Msosa was one of seven children born to a veterinarian father and an illiterate mother. She spent most of her childhood on the farm and learning about animals from her father. Msosa attended a boarding school in the 1950s, at a time where being educated was fairly uncommon. She recalled the importance of education being stressed in her household, commenting that “My father valued education; my mother was uneducated, but she also valued education. With limited resources, they made sure we had all we needed”. She reflects on her lifetime of career achievements, and adds, “I don’t know whether they knew that was the key, but here I am.”

As her educational career progressed, Msosa attended Likuni Girls school and went to the Bunda College of Agriculture. Msosa was one of the only three women in her class of 50 at Bunda College. She applied to study law at Chancellor College but soon realized that the college required at least two years of work experience or a degree, and to be a very good student in terms of “behavior”<sup>1</sup>. When Msosa finally achieved these requirements, she attended law school and received her Bachelor’s of Law from Chancellor at age 25 in 1975. Of only seven students in her class, Msosa was the only woman. This subsequently began her long-standing career in the legal field and was a foreshadowing of her propensity for challenging the male-dominated legal field.

Anastasia Msosa began her career in the legal field in 1975 as a State Legal Advocate. The function of a state legal advocate in Malawi is the same as a lawyer in public service. As a legal advocate, she worked on behalf of the state in civil and criminal cases. During this role, she worked briefly as a government lawyer, but mainly handled cases on the state level.



## Anastasia Msosa (Malawi)

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She then worked in the Department of Legal Aid in the year 1990 as a lawyer for individuals that could not afford legal representation. She progressed later to become a senior legal advocate, principle legal advocate, and finally chief legal advocate.

Right before she became a judge, she made another advancement in her career when she became the Registrar General and Administrator in the year 2000. To prepare for this role, Msosa attended several courses to help better her knowledge in this field. She eventually became the very first female judge at the High Court of Malawi as well as the first female Justice at the Supreme Court of Appeals. These positions preceded her appointment as the then Chief Justice of Malawi from 2013 to 2015, succeeding Chief Justice Lovemore Munlo after he resigned from the office. Msosa was personally appointed by former president of Malawi Joyce Banda, who expressed her admiration for Msosa in this quote: "Chief Justice Anastasia Msosa is one woman I have watched and followed for a long time and I have always been amazed at how much a woman can achieve in a lifetime." She also referred to Msosa as the "most senior in the system and well qualified." In 1993, Msosa became the first chairperson of the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC). The MEC is comprised of officers and staff members to fulfill its mission to deliver credible elections that instill democratic values in Malawi. After she was re-appointed in 2005, she held this position for two more terms until the year 2012.

Justice Anastasia Msosa has contributed in several ways to the legal and political landscape of Malawi throughout her extensive and fulfilling career. Msosa's unbelievable career feat in achieving every title that one can hold in the Malawian Judiciary is an important symbolic representation of female inclusion in the Malawian government. Not only did Msosa make history by attaining remarkable feats that no woman in Malawian history has reached, but these feats alone are effective in inspiring young Malawian women who long to see adequate female representation in their government and increasing female political participation in the national government. With her work in the Malawi Electoral Commission, she helped to guide Malawi into multiparty democracy in which political power is vested within the people through a voting system. Malawi has been a multiparty democracy since 1994.



# Anastasia Msosa (Malawi)

First Woman Chief Justice (Malawi)

By Taylor Duncan

A woman of many firsts and influential to Malawian women that long for their voice to be heard in their government, Anastasia Msosa serves as a pioneer to women in law and politics and women maneuvering through a male-dominated field all over the world. Anastasia Msosa is a force to be reckoned with; from a young age, she challenged social norms and traditions enforced on women to excel in areas from her education to her career. Besides the obvious achievements made in her field, Msosa is a pioneer in bringing new political ideologies to her country, as she helped to usher in an unprecedented era of democracy in Malawi.

Her contributions to the Malawian government and fearlessness when faced with societal norms that exclude women make her an undeniable trailblazer for Malawian women and the rest of the world.

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## Athaliah Molokomme, Ph.D. (Botswana)

First Woman Attorney General (Botswana)

By Donovan Carter

Athaliah Molokomme is a woman who wears many hats. Serving as a lawyer, a women's rights activist, an Ambassador, and an advocate, Molokomme has made incredible contributions to her home Botswana and the African continent. Born in December of 1959 to two school teachers in Francistown, a city in northern Botswana, Athaliah Molokomme's honest background would become crucial to her success. Growing up in a house of nine children, where Molokomme was the second-born, would lay a great foundation for education while instilling her values of sharing, community, mutual respect, and justice.

After learning to read at the tender age of three, Athaliah's parents would send her off to school. Despite her young age, Molokomme was a great student, spending formative years at primary school in Tchangati, Sebina, and Mathangwane. Molokomme's secondary schooling began in 1970 outside Botswana's capital city Gaborone, where she attended Catholic mission school, St. Joseph's College Kgale, where she graduated with a first-class examination classification in 1975.

Continuing a trajectory of academic excellence, Molokomme would receive several degrees and diplomas from all over the world. Molokomme earned not only a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Botswana and Swaziland, a Masters in Law from Yale Law School, and a Ph.D. in Law from Leiden University.

Molokomme's love for education comes from her strong set of values, and these values greatly influence how she uses her legal education and expertise. In an interview with the Justice Leadership Group, Molokomme stated that "I think those of us that have the opportunity and privilege to study law have a special responsibility to make sure that law does what it is meant to do, and that is to deliver justice because it doesn't always [on its own]." Molokomme has worked very hard to hold true to her own ideals, seeking to deliver justice with various roles, positions, and methods. Between 1981 and 1996, Molokomme would return to her alma mater, the University of Botswana, to teach Law--following in her parents' footsteps.

During an International Women's Day Speech in 2014, Molokomme spoke to the value of education with the statement "In Setswana, we say 'go ruta mosadi ke go ruta sechaba' meaning that 'to educate a woman is to educate a nation'." Molokomme's years as an educator, along with her extensive research on various legal topics like employment law, women in law, customary law, and family law have contributed greatly to the next generation of Botswana attorneys.





## Athaliah Molokomme, Ph.D. (Botswana)

First Woman Attorney General (Botswana)

By Donovan Carter

Naturally, Dr. Molokomme's legal expertise, passion for justice, and time spent in various national and international positions have earned her a great deal of recognition from several groups and organizations. Women, Law and Development International granted Dr. Molokomme the Women's Human Rights Award in 1993, and in 1999, she received the Presidential Order of Meritorious Service for Exceptional Service to Botswana. In July of 1998, Dr. Molokomme would serve as founding head of the Gender Unit at the Secretariat of the Southern African Development Community, until she was appointed Judge of the High Court of Botswana in May of 2003.

Two years after her appointment to the High Court of Botswana, Molokomme would be named the Attorney General of Botswana in 2005 and resigned from that position in December of 2016, where she left behind a better, fairer, and stronger system. Molokomme would maximize her new role as legal advisor to the government of Botswana, becoming quite involved in international affairs. She was later appointed Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Botswana to Switzerland and has participated in international events and like Assemblies of State Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, where she advocated for African nations' membership.

Molokomme's great feats all reflect greatly her strong values of fairness, justice, and equality. She has truly proved that determination, commitment, and a strong set of values can help one achieve any goal, no matter how challenging.

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## Baratang Constance Mocumie (South Africa)

Justice of the Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa

By Nomvelo Kunene and Omolola Botsane

Justice Baratang Constance Mocumie was born on 10 August in the small agricultural town of Warrenton in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. Justice Mocumie attended primary school in several mud schools and church buildings in Warrenton before completing high school at St. Paul's High School in the North West province. Both Justice Mocumie's parents were teachers; her mother, Ma Poppie Mocumie, initially worked as a domestic worker, but through sheer determination, went on to qualify as a teacher.

During the 1986 State of Emergency, Justice Mocumie was charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act for her participation in the liberation struggle. This experience fuelled her desire to correct the injustices of the apartheid system, leading her to study law. Being treated as equal to any task by her father, as well as witnessing her mother's resilience to obtain an education, amongst other things, further inspired her to study law.

She obtained her BLuris degree from the University of Zululand and an LLB degree from the University of North West. She holds a Masters in Law from the University of South Africa, specializing in Family Law. She started her legal career as a State Prosecutor at Ga-Rankuwa Magistrates Court, North West, and later at the Molopo Magistrates' Court in Mmabatho and Klerksdorp Magistrates Court. In April 1994, she was appointed a magistrate in the Mmabatho District Court. She later joined Justice College in Pretoria. She served as both a regional court magistrate and a lecturer in criminal law, family law, and social context (now known as diversity training) until 2005.

Her career in training commenced when she facilitated and presented workshops under the South African Council of Churches banner, to empower women and children on domestic violence and sexual offenses. In 2003, she was admitted as an Advocate of the High Court, and a few years later, she presided as an acting judge of the high courts in the Northern Cape, North West, and Free State High Court Divisions. She was later appointed a judge permanently in the Free State Provincial Division of the High Court in Bloemfontein. Presently, Justice Mocumie is a Judge in the Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) and a Judge of Appeal in the South African National Defence Force's Military Court.

She has previously acted in the Labour Appeal Court, the SCA, and the Competition Appeal Court.



## Baratang Constance Mocumie (South Africa)

Justice of the Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa

By Nomvelo Kunene and Omolola Botsane

Her 2016 appointment to the SCA was a significant moment as very few black African women had been appointed to the SCA at the time. Justice Mocumie has displayed her independent thinking through significant dissenting judgments she delivered in the Supreme Court of Appeal, which South Africa's Constitutional Court subsequently supported. One such example is the case of *Ruta v Minister of Home Affairs*. In this case, Mr. Ruta was arrested in Pretoria for traffic violations and later convicted and imprisoned for those offenses. The Department of Home Affairs applied for his deportation back to Rwanda. The Minister of Home Affairs refused an asylum status application by Mr. Ruta under the Refugees Act because his application was submitted late. The majority judgment of the SCA found that Mr. Ruta had failed to apply for asylum without delay and was consequently disqualified from applying for and receiving a refugee permit because he had been convicted of a traffic violation.

Justice Mocumie dissented in this ground-breaking judgment, finding that Mr. Ruta was to be afforded access to the Refugees Act application process as he had indicated his intention to apply for refugee status. Furthermore, only crimes committed outside of South Africa precluded an asylum application. The Constitutional Court overturned the majority judgment (ruling in line with the dissenting judgment of Justice Mocumie) and held that Mr. Ruta was able to apply for asylum and was not disqualified from doing so.

In another dissent in the *Pridwin Preparatory School* judgment, which involved an independent school's reliance on a cancellation clause in a contract it had entered into with a learner's parents, four justices of the SCA rejected the argument that the constitutional principle of "the best interests of the child", gave rise to the child's right to be heard before the parents' contracts were terminated. Moreover, the majority found that the obligation to provide basic education is an obligation on the state, not one imposed on private institutions. Justice Mocumie found that the other four judges' reasoning diverged substantially from the plethora of judgments of the SCA and the Constitutional Court concerning the child's best interests.

Justice Mocumie found that the school had acted unreasonably in terminating a contract without considering the best interests of the child and also found the termination clause contrary to public policy. The Constitutional Court endorsed Justice Mocumie's dissent, finding that the school had failed to determine what was in the best interests of the child.



## Baratang Constance Mocumie (South Africa)

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Finding further that Justice Mocumie had correctly reasoned her dissent and endorsed her view that “a contract with an independent school for the provision of an education is ‘distinctly different’ from an ordinary commercial transaction.”<sup>6</sup>

These dissenting judgments speak to Judge Mocumie’s jurisprudential prowess in delivering significant, ground-breaking judgments. They also highlight her care and compassion for the vulnerable in society. In a judgment which the SCA confirmed on appeal in 2014, *MEC v DN* Judge Mocumie held that an incident of rape that occurred when a woman pediatrician was on duty ‘did not arise out of and in the course of the doctor’s employment as a Registrar and that consequently, the rape was not an accident contemplated by S. 35 of COIDA. In essence, she held that the attack on the doctor bore no relationship to her employment and dismissed the MEC’s special plea with costs.

Justice Mocumie is acutely aware of the struggles that women like her encounter in a male-dominated judiciary. She is a founding member of the South African Women Lawyers Association (SAWLA) and the South African Chapter of the International Association of Women Judges (SAC-IAWJ), an organization that seeks to achieve the emancipation of women on the bench. Her commitment to attaining gender equality on the High Court bench has contributed to substantial subsequent appointments of women from the magistracy and other career paths to the judiciary, but there is no doubt that much more needs to be done to address the disparity. She served as the President of the SAC-IAWJ and represented women judges and the judiciary at regional and international conferences. During the interview, she especially remarked that her route to the bench has not been an easy one and that she had to work ten times as hard as her male counterparts to get to where she is today. She believes that further work is necessary to address the gender imbalances in our society, as women judges are under-represented on the bench.

Her active involvement in both the National Association of Democratic Lawyers and Black Lawyers Association preceded her appointment as a judge. She held several provincial and national leadership positions in the Judicial Officers Association of South Africa. She has also sat on the boards of the Restorative Justice Centre and AIDS Foundation, South Africa. She also serves on The Hague Conference on Private International Law, an inter-governmental organization in the area of private international law that administers several international conventions, protocols, and soft law instruments, and as a board member on the Forum on Judicial Leadership, Democratic Rights, and Governance Unit, University of Cape Town.





## Baratang Constance Mocumie (South Africa)

Justice of the Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa

By Nomvelo Kunene and Omolola Botsane

Justice Mocumie is an advocate for the single judiciary in South Africa and is well acquainted with the quality and expertise of many presiding Magistrates. She is a gender activist and scholar who believes in equal opportunities for all legally qualified persons especially women in ascending the benches of all South African courts. As the first judge to be appointed to the SCA from the ranks of the magistracy, she brings a wealth of understanding of the socio-economic dynamics that ordinary citizens of South Africa endure in seeking justice, in particular gender justice. Whilst there have been significant strides in appointing judges of the High Court from the rank of magistrates, she believes that effort must be made to ensure that there is ascendancy to other superior courts such as the Supreme Court of Appeal and the Constitutional Court. Since her appointment to the High Court bench in 2008, several other Judges were appointed directly from the Magistrate's ranks.

Despite her busy schedule, Justice Mocumie has made an active effort to mentor young women and girls in her free time – sharing her personal experiences and providing career guidance. She is a firm believer in investing in future generations and makes a conscious effort to play her role in inspiring young girls and women. She is also a mother to two beautiful children and a grandson who are her pride and joy.

Justice Mocumie is a leader in the judiciary and an excellent example for other young lawyers to follow and aspire to be, women lawyers, in particular, showing that through hard work, determination to rise above and against all odds and tenacity, barriers can be broken down.

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## Betty Mould-Iddrisu (Ghana)

First Woman Attorney General (Ghana)

By Emily Laflamme

Betty Mould-Iddrisu was born March 22, 1953, in Accra, the largest city in Ghana. Her mother was originally from Ejuratia - Kwabre in the Ashanti Region and her father was from James Town, Accra, Ghana. During her years of secondary education, Mould-Iddrisu attended Achimota School, Ghana International School, and Accra Academy. She went on to earn her Bachelor's in Law from the Faculty of Law (LLB), University of Ghana, Legon between the years of 1973-1976. She obtained her Master's degree in Law from the London School of Economics (LLM) in London, UK in 1978; she returned to the Ghana School of Law and was called to the Ghanaian Bar in 1979.

In 2009, Mould-Iddrisu was sworn in as the first female Attorney-General and Minister of Justice in Ghana. Prior to that, Betty Mould-Iddrisu, after her call to the Ghana Bar, from the early 1980s, became an active member of the Ghana branch of the International Federation of Lawyers (FIDA), a lawyers' association exclusively for women. Mould-Iddrisu held several executive positions in FIDA-Ghana and in 1986 assisted in the establishment of Ghana's first Legal Aid Centre, comprising a legal aid clinic and a legal literacy center. This was a response to the passage of family laws passed by the Government in 1985 designed to give women and children a share of the estate of their deceased spouse and father's property upon death intestate. She rose through the ranks of the FIDA-Ghana Executive to chair both the FIDA-Ghana (1994-96) and the FIDA-Africa group (1996-98). Her time as Chair was characterized by legal representation of women in court, research, legal literacy, legal advocacy, grassroots sensitization of women leaders at the local levels. FIDA-Ghana over the years became a household name in terms of women lawyers volunteering their knowledge, support & advocacy for the rights of indigent women.

In the course of her career, there has been no shortage of actions and positions held by Mould-Iddrisu. These include: State Attorney at the Ghanaian Ministry of Justice, a position she held rising to the rank of Chief State Attorney; She headed the International Law Division at the Ministry of Justice; She was appointed Copyright Administrator of Ghana in 1989; She led the Administration of Authors' Rights at the African Regional level; She rose to be an acknowledged global expert in Intellectual Property Law (her field of specialization) throughout her career representing Ghana and Africa as a speaker, expert, resource person, chair, consultant to the UN's World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) & other multilateral agencies.





## Betty Mould-Iddrisu (Ghana)

First Woman Attorney General (Ghana)

By Emily Laflamme

She pioneered the institution of the teaching of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in 1990 at the University of Ghana's Faculty of Law as a final year elective and taught IPR's herself for ten years until the year 2000, mentoring hundreds of lawyers in IP; She led the Ministry of Justice's International Law division; She was appointed as the Director of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs division of the UK based Commonwealth Secretariat in 2003 (The Commonwealth Secretariat is an intergovernmental multilateral organization which aims to achieve democracy, justice, and peace for its 55 member countries).

During her time as the head of the Ministry of Justice's International Law division in 1997, Mould-Iddrisu's responsibilities included more than just holding a title, she was also equipped to effect real change. Mould-Iddrisu implemented Ghana's international legal obligations by handling both national and regional responses to issues of global human rights. For example, she cooperated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ECOWAS & the African Union in enforcing the rights of women and children, establishing human trafficking protocols, and amendment of cross-border legislation to deal with the rising threat of terrorism. She also assisted with the African Union to ensure ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in Africa and helped to promote international humanitarian law in concert with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

In 1999, Mould-Iddrisu co-founded the African Women Lawyers Association (AWLA) and chaired the organization for many years to concretize her vision of networking for the passage of gender-responsive laws across Africa to engender issues of patriarchy, domestic violence & sexual abuse, engendering, and advocating for the passage of legislation of a woman's right to own property amongst others, and affirming spousal rights to property acquired within marriage. AWLA still exists in several African countries as a civil rights organization that tackles gender advocacy issues for the timely and effective delivery of justice for women and children. AWLA-Ghana is still active and still works in sensitizing women in the law, law enforcement, and the courts to issues of domestic violence and other gender-sensitive legislation.



## Betty Mould-Iddrisu (Ghana)

First Woman Attorney General (Ghana)

By Emily Laflamme

In 2003, Mould-Iddrisu was appointed as Director of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Legal and Constitutional Division. She served as in-house counsel and advisor on an array of legal issues to Presidents, Heads of States, Ministers of Justice, Attorneys-General, Senior Law Officials, governments, and politicians. She also developed policy and program development for the promotion of Law and Governance issues, global responses to constitutional matters & reform, implementing international law mandates in the area of gender, private international law, international law, intellectual property law, and multilateral trade issues. Her career achievements stretch far beyond the positions she had or the titles she held. They include the impact she has had on the people through her life-long support and mentoring of lawyers and organizations with which she shared her knowledge across Africa and indeed globally.

Betty Mould-Iddrisu, when she was appointed as the first female Attorney General and Minister of Justice of Ghana in 2009, used her time leading the Ministry to initiate reforms by streamlining the work at the Ministry, building the capacity of the state attorneys at a national & international level, expanding and building up capacity in the regional offices and the prosecutions division. She also championed the expansion of legal education in Ghana by assisting to establish more law schools in the country – remarkably this remains the only expansion that professional law has seen in decades in terms of capacity. In 2010, she also laid two groundbreaking Bills in Parliament seeking to operationalize constitutional provisions on the distribution of assets acquired during marriage upon dissolution of marriage and the other was a review of the Intestate Succession Law seeking to give spouses and children a greater share of property upon death intestate. These two Bills were testimony to her lifelong fight for engendering the rights of women through the law.

Throughout her career, Mould-Iddrisu pursued the advancement and empowerment of Ghanaian women through grassroots programs that placed a focus on women and children in the areas of judicial reform, justice, and dispute resolution. She fought against gender-based violence and was a leading member of Ghana's Domestic Violence Coalition which lobbied for the passage of Ghana's Domestic Violence Law finally passed in 2007.



## Betty Mould-Iddrisu (Ghana)

First Woman Attorney General (Ghana)

By Emily Laflamme

Betty Mould-Iddrisu, the pioneer, used what she had to propel herself to a position in which she could enact the change she saw fit and when she got to where she wanted to, she did not stop. She used her diverse ethnic background and experiences to represent a multitude of people in government and to present many perspectives. This made her a valuable asset to national, regional, and international organizations. Mould-Iddrisu started her career at the Ministry of Justice but continued to expand and extend to fields which at one time were out of the reach of many African women and achieved in areas that had hitherto been the preserve of men. She pioneered the teaching of a new legal field in Ghana. She was the first female Attorney General and Minister of Justice of Ghana.

She facilitated international cooperation, fought for the empowerment of women and children, and advised on regional and international policies, and pursued policies and programs for the benefit of her country. Betty Mould-Iddrisu's impact on governance in Ghana, as well as globally, has been and will always remain virtually important.

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## Boma Alabi (Nigeria)

First Woman President of the Commonwealth Lawyers Association

By Kiadum Nwakoh and Uche Odigili

Boma Florence Alabi OON is a qualified cross-border legal practitioner, admitted to practice law in Nigeria, England & Wales. She is one of the co-founding Partners of Primera Africa Legal (PAL) currently leading PAL's Dispute Resolution and Pro-Bono practice. Boma was born on 29th May 1966 and hails from Imo State, Nigeria. She was born and raised in a family of lawyers, an occurrence which she admits influenced her motivation in the profession. Her uncle, Ambrose Alagoa was the first indigenous Chief Judge of Rivers State. Another uncle of hers, Justice Stanley Alagoa was also a lawyer who rose to the position of Supreme Court Justice in Nigeria while her grandfather was a Magistrate and the Amayanabo of Nembe Brass, Bayelsa State. Regardless, growing up for her was, with a sense of hindsight, a typical middle-class experience. Her father studied Geography at the University College, Ibadan, and taught for many years before setting up a series of business ventures. He was pivotal in making her who she is today. Her principles and core beliefs were formed in conversations with him and continue to guide her every action today.

Boma undertook her secondary school education at Federal Government Girls College (FGGC), Abuloma, Rivers State, passing the West African Examination Council examination in 1983. She opted to obtain her university education in the oil-rich state from 1983 to 1987, graduating with a Bachelor of Laws (LL. B) from the Rivers State University. After her novel university experience, Boma proceeded to the Nigerian Law school where she impressively graduated with ease in 1988. Still unsatisfied with the knowledge she had amassed, she made a valiant decision to pursue an LLM program in King's College London where she acquired a degree in Maritime Law in 1989. A decade later, she would enroll at the Qualified Solicitors Transfer Test BPP Law School, London passing and qualifying to practice as a lawyer in England and Wales.

Currently, she leads Primera Africa Legal's International Commercial Law/Corporate Governance practice with experience in corporate commercial practice spanning approximately thirty years. In addition to being an experienced Arbitrator and accredited Civil and Commercial Mediator, Boma specializes in International Tax Law, Maritime Law, Mergers & Acquisitions, and Capital Market Transactions. She has advised on some of Nigeria's leading commercial deals in several sectors including real estate and infrastructure, manufacturing, banking, hospitality, telecommunications, maritime, energy, project funding, and development.

As a writer, Boma is as good as they come. Never too shy to share her knowledge and experience, in 2006, she published "Sisters in Law - Career choices for Nigerian women lawyers" a book aimed at assisting female lawyers in navigating the legal space.





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She followed up by writing another book, "Survival Manual for New Wigs" this time targeted at lawyers who had just gotten called to the Bar. She has appeared in several newspaper articles and magazines where she has made indelible contributions on legal issues. In addition, she has been a frequent guest speaker on government relations topics and legal issues (keynotes, seminars, workshops, papers, roundtables) throughout the world. Notably, she has delivered presentations for the Nigerian Bar Association, Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Commonwealth Law Association, International Bar Association, and the SADC Lawyers Association (SADCLA), to mention but a few. Commenting on why she remains unassuming and grounded despite her achievements, Boma had this to say; "I am not different from the next person. We are all human beings. We breathe the same air and drink the same water. We desire the same things, which are security for the family, individual happiness and the right to pursue our dreams."

Understanding the leverage she possesses, Boma has never hesitated to use her legal platform for the good of her community, providing pro bono legal services to vulnerable persons and organizations. For example, she has since 2011 provided legal representation to over 100 awaiting trial detainees and indigent convicts on death row, securing the release of many of them. She notably provided free legal advisory services to True Health Foundation - a charitable organization set up to assist Nigerians suffering from renal failure. In addition, she assisted in the establishment of a medical and education foundation that has since awarded scholarships to over 100 Nigerian youths and sponsored life-saving surgery for three patients.

Boma rendered free legal advisory services for low-income workers and pensioners in relation to employment law and workers' rights, landlord and tenant issues and pension rights. Understanding the importance of mentorship in the legal profession, Boma initiated, funded and organized an interactive mentoring scheme for law students of the Nigeria Law School (Lagos Campus). This noble cause has been running from 2008 till date and has inspired many law students. In 2014, she served as Head of SADC Lawyers' Association (SADCLA) Election Observer Mission to observe the South Africa Elections. The SADCLA is a voluntary association made up of law societies, bar associations, and individual lawyers from the 15-member Southern African region, and the Election Observer Mission team was made up of lawyers from all SADC region Countries. Boma places children, especially the girl-child, in high regard. As a member of the Advisory Board of WISCAR, she has championed initiatives aimed at empowering career women.





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Boma has also organized training for 300 Nigerian teenagers in conjunction with The Adolescent Project (TAP) and British Airways in the Community. In addition, she assisted "Save the Children" in its campaign for the education of the girl-child as one of the faces and voices of the campaign. In 2009, she set up a skills acquisition scheme for less privileged women with the assistance of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and also assisted the Nigeria High Commission to establish CANUK (Central Association of Nigerians in the UK).

Since commencing practice as a lawyer, Boma has continued to earn several stripes of her own. In 2004, she founded Sterling Partnership, a law firm with offices in London and Lagos, committed to providing legal services of world-class standard. At that time, she was a Council Member of the Board of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

In 2005, while still in London, she became the first minority ethnic lawyer to become chair of the Association of Women Solicitors (AWS) in its then 83-year history. The national AWS is now part of the Law Society Women's Division. An accredited civil and commercial mediator, she was nominated the London Borough of Southwark Woman Entrepreneur for 2007. Boma has continued to serve in different capacities notably serving as Member of the Section on Business Law – World Trade Organisation Working Group, Treasurer of the Section on Legal Practice, Nigeria Bar Association, Member of the Strategic Planning Committee, Nigeria Bar Association, Member of the Liberalization of Legal Services Working Group, Nigeria Bar Association, Chair, NBA Section on Legal Practice Professional Development Committee and as a Board Member in the Women in Successful Careers (WISCAR).

As further testament to her trailblazing achievements, Boma was elected the first black and female President of the Commonwealth Lawyers Association in Hyderabad, India in the over 50-year history of this association of lawyers. The Commonwealth Lawyers Association represents lawyers from all 54 Commonwealth countries as well as Law Societies and Bar Associations from the Commonwealth. Her role as President of the Commonwealth Lawyers Association involved extensive governmental and legislative relations both at the national and international levels including interfacing with commonwealth law ministers in various commonwealth jurisdictions. She carried out her functions diligently from February 2011 to April 2013 where she eventually handed over to her successor. Despite the magnitude of her achievement, she never got carried away and saw that role as an opportunity to serve. It was equally a humbling experience that pushed her even further to break barriers.



## Boma Alabi (Nigeria)

First Woman President of the Commonwealth Lawyers  
Association

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Boma has been the recipient of many awards. She was named the Women Entrepreneur of the Year in 2007 by the London Borough of Southwark. In 2012, she received the Distinguished Trailblazers Award which was awarded by the NBA Women Lawyers' Forum; the Nigerian Human Rights Community's Appreciation Award and the Award for Distinguished Service to the Legal Profession. In 2014, she was recognized by the Pan African Lawyers Union and the Nigeria Bar Association. In September of the same year, the then President of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan approved the conferment of the fifth highest award in the country, the coveted Order of the Niger National (OON) Award on Boma Alabi. Furthermore, in 2016 she was recognized and received an Award for Distinguished Service to the Legal Profession. This was presented to her by the Nigerian Bar Association, Lagos Branch. She was also honoured with an Award of Excellence by the Law Students' Society, University of Ibadan.

Other awards include an Excellence Award by the Advocates Association of Western India, the Human Rights Award presented by Open Society Foundations and National Human Rights Commission, and a Recognition of Outstanding Performance Award which was given by the Class of 2003 Nigerian Law School Alumni Association. Recognized for her outstanding achievements and integrity, Boma has continued to embody the essence and values that stood her out in her service to national development. She has campaigned for civil rights and social action, economic empowerment, education, environment, human rights, and poverty alleviation. She has no plan to slow down anytime as she believes that "life is very short," and we should not "put off anything you can do today, till tomorrow."

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## Catherine (Kate) O'Regan, Ph.D. (South Africa)

Judge (Rtd), Constitutional Court, South Africa.

By Jordan Orange

Kate O'Regan was born in Liverpool, England, on September 17th, 1957, into a large family of Irish descent. . With her family, Kate moved to Cape Town, South Africa, when she was seven years old. While living in South Africa, her mother worked as a dentist and her father as a doctor. One of her first memories of exposure to apartheid policy was during the forced removals of local communities in Cape Town in the winter of 1977. Her family assisted people whose homes had been bulldozed by state agencies to move their belongings to local churches where they could take shelter from the winter rains. . Kate originally chose to study journalism, but then shifted to law having been advised by newspaper journalists that it was a useful basic degree for journalism.

Kate O'Regan began her college career at the University of Cape Town. She obtained her Bachelor's in 1978. In 1980, she received her LL.B from the same university, graduating with cum laude honors. Continuing with her educational endeavors, she received an LL.M. from the University of Sydney in 1981 with first-class honors. A few years into her professional career, she went back to school in 1985 to obtain a doctorate in labor law at the London School of Economics. Kate O'Regan graduated from the London School of Economics in 1988 and proceeded on to a long career in the legal field. She later received seven honorary doctorates, including some from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2000, the University of Cape Town in 2004, and the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2008.

Kate O'Regan began her legal career as an articled clerk for a large firm of attorneys in 1982 in Johannesburg, South Africa. She spent four years largely working in the fields of labor law and land rights. During her time as an attorney in Johannesburg, she worked on behalf of many trade unions and anti-apartheid organizations. At the time she started work as a lawyer, labor laws had just been amended in South Africa to permit black workers to join trade unions lawfully which heralded extraordinary growth in the black trade union movement during the 1980s. Her labor law work was almost entirely for trade unions representing black workers. Her land work was for communities facing eviction under apartheid land policies. After completing her doctoral studies at the London School of Economics in 1988, she joined the Labor Law Unit at the University of Cape Town. After two years as a researcher, she became a senior lecturer at the University of Cape Town within the faculty of law.



## Catherine (Kate) O'Regan, Ph.D. (South Africa)

Judge (Rtd), Constitutional Court, South Africa.

By Jordan Orange

She continued to work at the university, heading substantial and impactful research projects. She became one of the founding members of the Law, Race, and Gender research project, as well as the Institute for Development Law.

She was called upon to become an advisor to the African National Congress concerning land claims legislation. Her previous experience as an attorney in Johannesburg made her perfect for the position. Then, she was asked to join the National Manpower Commission on gender equality law. During this same period, she became a trustee of the Legal Resources Trust in South Africa, South Africa's pre-eminent public interest law firm. Additionally, O'Regan edited a book with Christina Murray on forced removals and the law, *No Place to Rest, Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa*, 1989 (Oxford University Press). She wrote a series of academic articles on labor law, land law and also edited a digest of labor arbitration decisions. In 1994, she was appointed as a judge to the newly formed Constitutional Court in South Africa alongside Justice Yvonne Mokgoro. They were the only female judges on the Court for the first 13 years after its inception. She was appointed Deputy Chief Justice from February to May 2008. Her term of office on the Court ended in October 2009.

In 2008, she was appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to become the inaugural chairperson of the Internal Justice Council of the United Nations. One of the primary responsibilities that the Council had was identifying suitable individuals for appointment as judges of the UN Dispute and Appeals Tribunals. Her term was four years. Justice O'Regan served as an ad hoc judge of the Supreme Court of Namibia from 2010 - 2016. She also chaired a commission of inquiry into policing in Khayelitsha, Cape Town from 2012 - 2014. After she left the Constitutional Court, O'Regan also continued to teach as an honorary professor at the University of Cape Town and a visiting professor at the University of Oxford. Since 2016, she has been the inaugural Director of the Bonavero Institute of Human Rights at the University of Oxford, which has led her to split her life between Oxford and Cape Town. She has used her knowledge and experience in serving on the boards of many organizations seeking to promote human rights, the rule of law, and democracy in South Africa and beyond such as Corruption Watch, the Equal Education Law Centre, SAFLII NPC, amongst many others.





## Catherine (Kate) O'Regan, Ph.D. (South Africa)

Judge (Rtd), Constitutional Court, South Africa.

By Jordan Orange

She also serves on the editorial board of many legal publications. Her long career has helped many South Africans and has provided awareness of the injustices people faced under apartheid and other unjust legal systems.

Kate O'Regan has pushed for racial and gender equality in South Africa. She was an early proponent of the principle of racial and gender equality in judicial appointments. She served as legal counsel for black workers and trade unions in South Africa as well as for black South Africans facing evictions under the apartheid laws. Her experience as an attorney acting for black workers and those facing evictions informed her approach to her work as a judge of South Africans on the Constitutional Court of South Africa, to enforce laws that uphold the country's new democratic system. As a trailblazer in the legal field, Kate O'Regan has shown that a woman can speak out against, and fight unjust laws to seek to ensure that the law is responsive to the needs of ordinary people and that it treats people fairly.

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## Diakite Manassa Dianoko (Mali)

First Woman President of the Constitutional Court

By Papa Thierno Ndoeye

Diakité Manassa Dianoko is a Malian jurist born on January 19, 1945, in Kadiolo, a Malian border town located in the Sikasso region. She obtained her Certificate of Elementary Primary Studies in 1957-1958 in her native village at the Dialakoro School in Kadiolo. Dianoko then attended the Terrassons high school in Fougères, where she passed the First Cycle Study Certificate in 1962. After the baccalaureate in 1966, she enrolled at the National School of Administration of Mali in Bamako, where she obtained her master's degree in law.

Ms. Dianoko then traveled to France where she would do numerous internships in courts and tribunals. The first two of the internships were organized by the International Institute of Public Administration under the direction of Mr. Gilbert Mangin, a counselor at the Paris Court of Appeals, and lasted respectively from October 1971 to December 1971 and from January 1972 to June 1972.

The first woman President of the Bamako Court had a prosperous professional career. Ms. Dianoko had held many important positions in the Malian judiciary for more than twenty-five years (25 years), which had earned her the titles of "exceptional class magistrate" and "dean of the corps."

During the period from 1970 to 1981, she was a successful Investigating Judge at the Court of 1st instance of Ségou, the President of the Labor Court of Ségou (December 1970 to October 1971), Substitute of the Public Prosecutor at the Court of 1st instance of Ségou (July 1972 to October 1974), Substitute of the Public Prosecutor near the Court of 1st instance of Kayes (November 1974 to November 1977), Substitute of the Public Prosecutor near the Court of 1st instance of Sikasso (December 1977 to November 1978), General Substitute to the Bamako Court of Appeal, General Counsel to the Bamako Court of Appeal (November 1979 to June 1981).

Then, between 1981 and 1988, she worked as a Counselor first at the Mali Court of Appeal in Bamako and then at the Special Court of State Security before being appointed President of the Court of 1st Instance in Bamako. She was twice elected as a member of the Superior Council of Magistracy (1979 - 1988). The renowned magistrate suffered a professional setback in 1988 after the cessation of her professional activities following an interim order that led to her suspension and expulsion from the body of magistrates. However, Ms. Dianoko carried the fight with dignity. She fought a legal battle by bringing the case to the level of the Supreme Court of Mali, which finally recognized the illegality of the radiation decree in February 1991.



## Diakite Manassa Dianoko (Mali)

First Woman President of the Constitutional Court

By Papa Thierno Ndoeye

Thus, after three years of inactivity (1988 - 1991), she was reinstated in the judiciary body and worked as an agent in the National Directorate for the Administration of Justice (DNAJ).

In 1991, Mrs. Dianoko became Prosecutor General at the Court of Appeal of Bamako for four years before becoming a Prosecutor General at the Supreme Court of Mali in 1995, where she was involved in the historic "trial of crimes of blood." This valiant lady did not stop there. She chained the posts of responsibility by becoming Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Mali in countries like Canada, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela between 1995 and 2002.

After these critical diplomatic missions, Ms. Dianoko was appointed Director of the DNAJ for the period from October 2004 to March 2005 and subsequently magistrate awaiting transfer from 2005 to 2008. In February 2008, the Superior Council of the Magistrature appointed her as an adviser to the Constitutional Court and, in February 2015, her renewed mandate, by the President of the Republic, Ibrahima Boubacar Keita, got her elected to the prestigious Constitutional Court of Mali. We should recognize that Mrs. Dianoko lived a brilliant obstacle course. The Iron Lady greatly contributed to the strengthening of the law in Mali through her participation in many meetings at the national and international level to raise Malian justice to the highest summit, promote the rule of law, allow the emergence of human rights, and especially to promote the development of women.

The current President of the Constitutional Court of Mali was a member of the government delegation, which signed the Franco-Malian convention on justice in 1971. She was also delegated by the Ministry of Justice of Mali to the consultative congress of the Federation of African Jurists held in Dakar in November 1982 and at the international congress on crime in Addis Ababa in November 1986. As President of the Correctional Chamber of the Mali Court of Appeal of Bamako, she was a member of the commission drafting insurance laws with expatriate experts and the Ministry of Finance in 1985. She was also a delegate of the Ministry of Justice of Mali to the statutory congress of the Federation of African Jurists held in Libreville from 1986 to 1988. A member of the Commission of the National Union of Women of Mali (UNFM) formed to proofread the marriage and guardianship code.

From 1991 to 1995, she represented the Ministry of Justice of Mali at the Communication Days, a seminar on democratic governance with donors and USAID, and at a seminar on policing of the International Committee of the Cross -Rouge (ICRC) in Bamako.



# Diakite Manassa Dianoko (Mali)

First Woman President of the Constitutional Court

By Papa Thierno Ndoeye

Named Knight of the National Order, Mrs. DIANOKO is one of the twenty-five (25) "heroines" of the democratic movement in Mali having denounced- in "March of the women of 1991 - chronicle of a Malian revolution"- the dictatorship of General Moussa Traore. In this regard, we can say that her determination in work is a measure of her impeccable integrity. Thus, one of her statements teaches us more about her values to which she is deeply attached.

"Also, in 1988, as President of the Bamako court, I made a decision in the context of the liquidation of Air Mali, which did not please the President. And I was told to come back to this. I refused to comply. I was taken to the disciplinary council for the judiciary. Then I was suspended before being removed from the profession. However, I had just received the highest score from the President of the Supreme Court!"

Therefore vigorously obstructing President Moussa Traore, Ms. Dianoko is undoubtedly a model of an experienced female lawyer with great conviction, very committed, and very dedicated to the task. Since presiding over the Constitutional Court, she has fought fiercely for the establishment of real democracy in Mali by ensuring the preservation of the foundations of the Republic. Mrs. Manassa DIANOKO also works for the integration of a civic education module on Institutions of the Republic of Mali, so that the citizens take cognizance of it. It is this consistency in the action that makes the President of the French Constitutional Council, Mr. Laurent Fabius say "how not to help the Constitutional Court of Mali when you have a personality of your fabric in mind?".

Additionally, she fought fiercely for the emancipation of the female gender. For this very reason, she created the Collective of Women of Mali (COFEM) and contributed to the drafting of the statutes. The publication director of the Malian biweekly general information, Chiaka Doumbia, tells us about the birth of the Association of Women Lawyers of Mali that the Honorable Ms. Manassa DIANOKO, publication director of the review of the Constitutional Court, initiator of said organization, has a "talent of a fine strategist".

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## Effie Owuor (Kenya)

First Woman Judge (Kenya)

By Stephen Muthoka Mutie, Ph.D.

Effie Owuor's life is a journey replete with experiences that have left an indelible mark in the lives of the women and children of Kenya. Being a trailblazer par excellence, retired Lady Justice Effie Owuor has been a source of immense inspiration to women's empowerment, leadership, and social mobility in Kenya. Often when women take leadership positions on the global stage, breaking the glass ceiling in business, education, and law, it is through the efforts of women pioneers that have opened the doors of opportunity. Despite being labeled rebels, toxic feminists, or trouble makers, these pioneers relentlessly continued their work, leading to the realization of the freedoms women have today and paving the way for women to continue fighting for equality. Effie Owuor is one such pioneer.

Owuor was born in 1943 in Kakamega County, Kenya, during Kenya's colonial period. Owuor was among the few women who had access to education during the colonial era. She attended Butere Girls High School where she completed her Ordinary levels from 1958 to 1961. She then joined Alliance Girls where she completed her Advanced levels by 1963. She later joined the University of East Africa at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where she pursued her Bachelor's degree in law.

Her outstanding career began as a State Counsel in the Attorney General's Chambers where she was appointed as Resident Magistrate in 1971 and later elevated to Senior Magistrate. As a Magistrate, Owuor presided over purely criminal matters for ten years. A stint at the State Law Office in 1967 was the beginning of her ascent, becoming the first woman State Counsel and first woman prosecutor with a resident magistrate and senior magistrate's appointments. In 1983, President Moi appointed her to the High Court where she took her place as the first woman judge. At the High Court and later at the Court of Appeal, she presided over complex civil, criminal, and constitutional cases and appeals. In her tenure as a judge, she chaired and was commissioner of various task forces. Notably, together with Cecil Miller and C.B. Madan, in 1983 she was appointed by the government to the Judicial Commission of Inquiry to investigate the conduct and corruption allegations against former Attorney General Charles Njonjo.

As her career progressed, she held a series of "firsts", including first Kenyan woman to receive a law degree from the University of Dar es Salaam; first woman prosecutor in Kenya's Office of the Attorney General; first woman to become a magistrate and a senior resident magistrate; first woman judge in Kenya; first woman judge on the Court of Appeal of Kenya; and first woman to sit on a Commission of Inquiry of monumental historical significance in Kenya's political history.





## Effie Owuor (Kenya)

First Woman Judge (Kenya)

By Stephen Muthoka Mutie, Ph.D.

A mother of six, Owuor is not only an exacting jurist but also a strong advocate of women's and children's rights throughout her legal career. She was instrumental in stewarding the development of the Children's Act and served as Kenya's Goodwill Ambassador to UNICEF, a role that garnered her special commendation from the UN Secretary-General. As a goodwill ambassador to UNICEF, Owuor's special role was in advocacy, fundraising, and highlighting the rights and plight of children in need of special protection. Today, Kenyan children are protected by the progressive Children's Act of 2001, implemented because of her advocacy in her position as Chair of the National Task Force on laws relating to children from 1992 to 1996.

Much of Owuor's 33 years of service was dedicated to advocating for women's rights and emancipation. Unfortunately, when people discuss the advances for women's rights, especially in the Marriage Bill and the Constitution, little is mentioned of her, a fate that characterizes the legacies of women pioneers in Kenya: a deliberate forgetting of the contributions of women. Owuor chaired the Task Force on Implementation of the Sexual Offences Act ("TFSOA" or "Task Force"), which was established by the Attorney General on March 16, 2007. The Task Force's mandate was to oversee the implementation of Kenya's 2006 Sexual Offences Act and was extended to continue its work to 2012. Its membership included representatives from both government and civil society, with its leadership vested in Owuor.

Despite sitting on task forces that review discriminatory laws against women, the death of Owuor's husband brought calls for her to follow the Luo customs of widow inheritance. Contrary to the custom, Owuor stood her ground and didn't allow the application of the discriminatory practice. Owuor objected against the Luo belief that when a man died, his wife was defiled by an evil spirit which then had to be cleansed by having sexual intercourse with a social misfit. In her attack, Owuor posed the question: "What is dirty about me that requires to be cleansed; what good is there for widows in the custom?" She called the practice repugnant and averred that it should not be practiced in modern society. As a prominent leader, Owuor's attack on widow cleansing and inheritance reverberated everywhere in Kenya. It generated a heated debate on the relevance of the practice as the country approached the new millennium.

Owuor also consults for various national institutions, governments, and non-governmental institutions within the country and the region and has written and presented several papers and opinions on justice, governance and human rights issues, children's rights, and gender inclusion.





## Effie Owuor (Kenya)

First Woman Judge (Kenya)

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In recognition of her work, Owuor was awarded the Second Class of the Elder of the Burning Spear (EBS). These commendations are given to recipients on the advice of the National Honours and Awards Committee in the Office of the President. According to the National Honours Act, those who merit the decoration include a person who exhibits exemplary qualities; achievements of heroism, patriotism, or leadership; or one who has made an exemplary contribution to the country in the economic, scientific, academic, sports, journalism, business, security or other fields. She was also recognized in the UNICEF Millennium State of the World's Children Report as a fierce advocate of children's rights.

After taking early retirement in 2003 due to an accusation of corruption by the Aaron Ringera "radical surgery" anti-corruption report. In conclusion, Owuor embodies the spirit of a woman pioneer. Breaking the 96-year pattern of men only in the judiciary, she presided over a diverse set of cases and championed women's and children's rights throughout her career. Owuor's career leaves a legacy of passion and commitment to advancing human rights and serves as an example for those wishing to follow her.

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## Elisabeth Dior Fall Sow (Senegal)

First Woman Prosecutor

By Fatou Kiné DIAKITE

Elisabeth Dior Fall Sow, an exceptional Senegalese magistrate and legal scholar, was born in 1968. A magistrate by training, Ms. Dior Fall Sow held this position for a lengthy period before her retirement. She also held the position of an investigative judge before she was appointed prosecutor of the Republic, Court of First Instance of St. Louis in Senegal.

Ms. Dior Fall Sow was the first female in Senegal, appointed as prosecutor of the Republic at the Court of First Instance of Saint-Louis in 1976. Without hesitation in leaving Dakar, she was the first woman to move to the St Louis region as an examining magistrate, in 1971, and among the six people assigned Saint-Louis as a duty station. Her impressive work ethic was perceived as symbolic of the ability of women to practice within the legal profession. In her early days in St Louis, she would occasionally be made to act as a prosecutor when the latter was out of town. Therefore, when the prosecutor was posted to another area, he suggested her name as his successor as a prosecutor in the office of St. Louis. Thus, in 1976, Dior Fall Sow became the first female prosecutor in Senegal. She was fully aware of the challenging aspects of the position and how her success in the same would open similar doors for other women.

Throughout her professional career, Dior Fall Sow assumed various functions in Senegal and internationally, including serving as the National Director of Educational Supervision and Social Protection; the Director of Legal Affairs at Sonatel-Orange; Legal Advisor to the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (UNICTR); Principal Attorney General for the Court of Appeals of the Criminal Court of Justice of Rwanda; and Consultant for the International Criminal Court. From 2001 to 2005, Dior Fall Sow was a member of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In 2015, she was made Honorary President of the Network of Journalists in Gender and Human Rights.

Dior Fall Sow is a highly distinguished Senegalese magistrate reputed for her domestic and international contribution in the field of human rights (mainly women and children); peace and security; and criminal justice. She is known for traveling around the world to advocate for women's causes. Dior Fall Sow has spoken at seminars, workshops, and conferences in several countries around the world on various aspects of human rights notably on the rights of women and children, crime prevention, treatment of offenders, and international humanitarian law.



## Elisabeth Dior Fall Sow (Senegal)

First Woman Prosecutor

By Fatou Kiné DIAKITE

Dior Fall Sow is an honorary president of the Association of Women Jurists. She began campaigning for the protection of women's rights with the Association of Senegalese Jurists in 1974 under the benevolent aze of her elders like Mame Madior Boye, first président of AJS. The foundation of the said association was laid by friendship shared amongst four women: Mame Madior Boye, Maïmouna Kane, Madeleine Devès, and Tamara Touré. The initial two were magistrates, and the latter two were labor inspectors. AJS was the first women's association fighting for equality of men and women before the law in Senegal. As the enthusiasm for the cause bolstered, the friends decided to formally start an organization in the form of the Association of Senegalese Jurists. She is still at the AJS but completed her presidency position in 2002.

With regards to defending women's rights and gender equality, Dior Fall Sow is reputed as an indomitable force. Her desire first translated into awareness-raising given that people in Senegal were then oblivious to these rights. Together with some of her peers, they engaged in a lot of advocacy, lectures, dinner debates, meetings, open houses, free consultations. Fall Sow and her colleagues were part of the first and only movement in Senegal to use the law as a means to establish equality. After undertaking a UNICEF-funded study to harmonize Senegalese law in conformity with UN conventions for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDEF), which is a Magna Carta as is called for women's rights, Dior Fall Sow headed a team that drafted Senegal's 1999 law outlawing female genital mutilation.

Dior Fall Sow's career has not been limited to the national level. She finished her career as a Senior General Counsel at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania for eight (8) years.



## Elisabeth Dior Fall Sow (Senegal)

First Woman Prosecutor

By Fatou Kiné DIAKITE

She remains active on the national and international scenes, contributing her knowledge and experience through her ongoing participation in various conferences, panels, and roundtable consultations as well as numerous studies and publications. Her retirement has allowed her to focus on research, yielding publications within several fields including human rights (particularly the rights of women and children in Senegal), rape and violent crimes in times of conflict; gender-based violence; and the integration of women into the armed forces. Following the horrific rape and murder of two young Senegalese ladies, Binta Camara and Coumba Yade, Dior Fall Sow became one of the key figures in establishing the bill to criminalize rape and pedophilia in Senegal. She spoke of the need to criminalize rape in Senegal during a sit-in at the Obisesque Square, organized by women's organizations as part of the "daffa doye" (which translates from Wolof as "it is enough") movement.

Further, Dior Fall Sow is currently in charge of the commission of scholarships and awards of the Keba Mbaye Foundation. She is also a member of the Alliance for Migration, Leadership, and Development (AMLD), and the International Organization for La Francophonie Network for the Equality of Men and Women. In recognition of her contribution to the legal industry, Dior Fall Sow was appointed as a Knight and Officer of the National Order of Merit of Senegal.

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## Essi Matilda Forster (Ghana)

First Woman Lawyer (Ghana)

By Maame Efua Addadzi-Koom

Essi Matilda Forster (née Christian) was born on 12 September 1922 in Sekondi, the Gold Coast, (modern-day Ghana) to George James Christian and Aba Lucy French. Her father who was originally from Dominica in the Eastern Caribbean settled in Sekondi in 1902. He had attended the First Pan-African Congress in London in 1900 and regarded himself as a "returned exile." Her mother was from Shama in the Western Region of the Gold Coast. Essi's father, George James Christian was a private legal practitioner, a politician, and a businessman. He represented the Western Province of the Gold Coast as an elected member of the Legislative Council for ten years from 1930 to 1940.

At the age of five, Essi was sent to England for her education. Essi made her intentions of pursuing law known to her parents by January 1940. Like her father, she qualified as a Barrister-at-Law and was called to the English Bar at Gray's Inn, London in November 1945. She was called to the Gold Coast Bar on 15 April 1947 making her the first woman lawyer on the Gold Coast and the third woman lawyer in British West Africa. The first African woman lawyer was Stella Thomas, who was appointed Stipendiary Magistrate in Lagos, Nigeria. Frances Wright from Sierra Leone who also attended Gray's Inn was the second. In that same year, Essi was also called to the Gambia bar where she practiced law from 1947 to 1951.

Essi was also a wife and a mother. On 17 December 1944, she married Prof. Edward Francis Bani Forster, a psychiatrist from the Gambia. They had three children, Bankie Forster, Ekow Forster, and Estelle Matilda Appiah (née Forster). Essi moved to the Gold Coast from the Gambia in July 1951 when her husband took up service in the colonial administration as the first African psychiatrist at the Mental Hospital in Accra. She was the Acting Registrar of Companies, Births, and Deaths in Accra for six months. She also worked as the legal advisor to Mobil Oil Ghana Ltd from 1957 to 1982. At Mobil Oil, Essi's services were so valued by the Company that she was asked to determine her salary when she was engaged. Her appointment as a corporate legal adviser set a precedent in Ghana, allowing all large Corporations in the country to retain lawyers on their staff. She served in that capacity for over twenty-five years.

Essi followed in her father's footsteps by engaging in many professional and public service activities. She was a founding member of the Ghana International School Committee from 1954 to 1959. Within that same period, she was also a member of the Accra Magisterial District Prohibition Committee.





# Essi Matilda Forster (Ghana)

First Woman Lawyer (Ghana)

By Maame Efua Addadzi-Koom

She was a founding member and President of the Ghana branch of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) and the Inner Wheel Club of Accra. As a member of FIDA Ghana, she made recommendations to the Ghana Law Reform Commission on intestate succession, widowhood rites, maintenance of children, and abortion.

These were novel areas of law in the best interests of women and children. She also served in the following organizations in various roles: Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.) where she served as the Vice President and Secretary of the Y.W.C.A. Hostel Committee; Ridge Church Sunday School as secretary from 1963 to 1980; chairperson of the Nurses and Midwives (Accra) Schools Board of Governors from 1969 to 1972; President of the Ghana Girl Guides and substitute member of the Constitution Committee of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts from 1972 to 1975. Essi considered these professional and voluntary public service activities as essential to a full and interesting life.

After her retirement, she led a quiet life and was known to be one who loved to walk. All who knew Essi, knew her to be a wise woman with a memorable laugh. Essi was described as "fiercely independent" even in her old age and this independence may have contributed to her untimely death in August 1998 when she was fatally knocked down by a motorcyclist in Accra. She died at the age of seventy-five. Essi was the most senior lawyer of the Ghana Bar at the time of her death. She blazed the trail for women lawyers in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa and mentored many who aspired to be like her.

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