



# CENTRE FOR AFRICAN JUSTICE PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

## WOMEN IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION



# TABLE OF CONTENTS



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## **03** FOUNDERS STATEMENT

*by Sophia Ugwu*

---

## **06** INTERVIEW WITH DELPHINE DJIRAÏBÉ

---

## **11** INTERVIEW WITH DR. ABIOLA MAKINWA

---

## **19** INTERVIEW WITH CHINELO EGBUNONU

---

## **25** INTERVIEW WITH EVELYN ANKUMAH

---

## **30** MY JOURNEY

*by Rumbidzai Lorraine Mudzongo*

---

## **34** IMPACT OF COVID-19

*by Andromeda Anyan*

---

## **38** FEATURE: DIVERSITY SPICES LIFE!

*by Ari Tobi-Aiyemo*

# *Founders Statement*

## **BARRISTER SOPHIA UGWU**

**MAGAZINE JAN 2022 ISSUE**



Equality, justice, and equity are all significant aspects of modern society that must be recognized and taken into account. It is therefore critical that individuals are treated fairly, treated as equals, and are informed of their rights. Lawyers play an essential role in the legal system because they ensure that everyone is treated fairly. They also ensure that everyone has the right to necessary legal representation. African female lawyers, in particular, are playing important roles in society through their presence within and outside the African continent. Also, by becoming part of peace and conflict resolution processes and, adopting justice and equality as fundamental principles, African female lawyers become instruments of peace in society and they construct bridges of unity to the rest of the world. For this reason, we want to shine a focus on inspiring female lawyers who have relocated from Africa to other nations to thrive in their legal careers, by providing a platform for their stories to be shared.

As we already know, the tradition of African storytelling is one of the oldest in African culture, across the continent. Thus, since the olden times, storytelling within the African culture has been a way of passing on knowledge, motivation, traditions, values, as well as upholding and preserving peace and good social order. In the daily interactions among family members, groups and communities, they always use stories to pass on important messages and words of wisdom necessary for success or to correct people's mistakes. Through stories, young people learn valuable lessons about life – because stories are used to portray human strengths and weaknesses, pass on methods of survival in difficult life situations and give hope for the future. Storytelling whether oral or written has a distinct significance within our society because it functions as a pivotal medium of educational, social, religious, cultural, mental and emotional edification. It is a powerful tool for communicating people's experiences, knowledge and wisdom. That is why to this date, it remains a valuable method of empowering people, particularly when it shows the kind of courage needed to tackle difficult life situations.

In light of this, this edition of our Women Empowerment Team magazine, titled “Women in the legal profession” focuses on the experiences of African female lawyers with the aim of motivating young African female lawyers and those aspiring to become one, to pursue similar leadership roles within the legal profession. The magazine shares the personal stories of successful African female lawyers and discusses their paths to the legal profession, how they climbed to various positions in the legal field, and how they have made significant contributions to the growth of the law and women's empowerment.

The Women Empowerment team at the Centre for African Justice, Peace, and Human Rights (CAJPHR) believe that women's empowerment and autonomy, as well as improvements in their political, social, and economic status, are all essential objectives in and of themselves. This is because, women's empowerment enhances independence as it allows them to achieve their highest potential through the tools they receive; it means that when empowered, women are able to provide for themselves, take care of themselves, and be confident in themselves. That is why this magazine shares the experiences of successful African female lawyers because they are capable of positively impacting the lives of young girls and women who aspire to be just like them. After all, it is said that empowered women empower other women.

The stories that these phenomenal African women told about themselves and their careers reflect the values they cherish including - **courage, tenacity, uprightness, hard work, service to humanity, loyalty, equity/justice, intelligence, dedication, and generosity**, among others. Thus, we believe that this publication is the glue that will bind young African women to their future goals. It will encourage them to keep working hard until they achieve all their dreams, no matter the challenges they may encounter in their journey.

On this premise, I would like to thank Evelyn Ankumah, Executive Director of Africa Legal Aid; Delphine Kemneloum Djiraïbé, founder of the Public Interest Law Centre Tchad; Dr. Abiola Makinwa, Principal Lecturer at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, and Chinelo Egbunonu, Vice President of the Female Black Lawyers Network Canada, for sharing their personal stories and perspectives on women's empowerment specifically in the field of law. I thank them for demonstrating their support for gender equality by endorsing the call for the recognition of African women's contributions to the legal field. In addition, I thank Dr. Ari Tobi-Aiyemo for her poem and also thank the female law students - Andromeda Anyan and Rumbidzai Lorraine Mudzongo, who have contributed to this issue by sharing their personal stories on how COVID-19 has affected their relocation from Africa to The Netherlands, their studies, and their daily lives.

Additionally, I would like to thank our readers for taking the time to read these inspiring interviews and informative articles. We hope to have inspired you with these distinct viewpoints of African female lawyers who shared their experiences. We also hope to have helped you step out of any current challenges you may be facing, and that you enjoy this magazine edition.

Finally, I would like to thank the CAJPHR Board members and all the Women Empowerment Team members who have helped to produce and publish this magazine issue. We look forward to further dialogue about the empowerment of women, sharing many of the successful African women's true-life stories and experiences.

*Sophia Ugwu*

Founder CAJPHR

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The greatest lesson I learnt, which would also double as my advice to young female African lawyers like me is: never be afraid to ask for help. You could be drowning, and no one will know if you do not speak up. For every door or so closed in your face when you reach out, there are ten more willing to open and help you.

- Chinelo Egbunonu





# *Interview with* **DELPHINE DJIRAÏBE**

*Delphine Djiraïbé has been named one of Chad's most prominent human rights lawyers, fighting for women empowerment and environmental rights. She founded the Public Interest Law Center to support women in Chad.*

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**Could you tell us a bit about yourself and about your journey to becoming a lawyer?**

I was born in a middle class family and had a chance to go to school, in a society where girls are mainly taught to stay home and handle housekeeping activities. I faced discrimination too early. In fact, while my brothers and I had to go to school together, back home I was the one to cook lunch for them, clean up after them. After I finished high school and headed to university, I chose to study law.

**What inspired you to become a human rights lawyer, and more specifically, to defend the environmental rights of Chadian civilians?**

The Nigerian oil exploitation experience was my inspiration. The enormous damages caused to both the environment and human beings, in particular to Ogoni people were my deep motivations. Coming from southern Chad, where oil resources are exploited, I wanted to avoid such an environmental and human disaster to happen in Chad.

**You are described as “one of Chad’s most prominent human rights lawyers”. How do you feel about your achievements and the challenges you have faced during your career?**

As a woman, and pioneer in the struggle for the promotion, defense and education of human rights - including women rights and environmental rights - it was not easy to speak out against cultural and religious habits in a very hostile environment such as the one in Chad. It takes courage and determination. I am proud that God used me to fight for voiceless people in Chad. I did contribute for the recognition of human rights in general and women’s rights in particular. I am grateful to God first and then to my parents who allowed me to go to school and to all my friends who supported me.

**Often whilst promoting human rights of the Chadian people, you have been at personal risk from the government. As a woman, how have you been able to deal with and overcome these challenges and risks?**

The government of Chad is the main human rights violator. It goes after human rights activists and threatens their life. In such a situation, there is nothing much to do other than trusting God and relying on Him for our protection. My strength comes first from my faith in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. And then, to see that people rely on me and support me in various ways, keeps me going.

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The recognition that I receive through the *RFK human rights award*, and the *Franco-Allemand human rights and rule of law award*, are among things that gave me strength. The government of Chad’s recognition as an enemy of the nation is, for me, an Oscar award for best actor in the human rights arena, which encouraged me to fight it even more fiercely than before! And last but not least, my family remains the rampart within which I feel secure.





**In 2005, you were awarded the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award and in 2009, you were named one of Africa's 100 most important advocates for change by the magazine Jeune Afrique.**

**What did you do differently? Do you have any personal beliefs/values, which you believe have led you to these outstanding achievements, which you would want young African female lawyers to learn?**

Looking back at the last 30 years and counting all risks and situations I put myself in to protect and defend human rights, I am amazed that I am still alive!

My fight against human rights violations has been and is still influenced by my faith in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. From this standpoint, I see the whole struggle from different perspectives than others. As I committed myself and all my projects to Jesus Christ of Nazareth, I just dive in until I reach the set goals. My profound desire is to see more and more young African female lawyers commit themselves to fight for the respect of human rights relying solely on bible's principles.



**In 2007, you established the Public Interest Law Center (PILC), which helps Chadian women who face challenges concerning their rights. From your perspective, what is one of the most efficient ways to empower African women and to make them recognize/realize their rights?**

I believe that one of the most efficient ways to empower African women and to make them recognize/realize their right, is to give them access to education. From there onward, they will first know their rights, duties and responsibilities, second claim them and finally teach themselves financial literacy to free themselves from economic dependence.

**Could you tell us about any success stories from PILC related to women's rights and empowerment?**

A woman victim of domestic violence said: "...now that PILC has open my eyes, I know that my husband has no right to beat me and to mistreat me like I am his slave.... I know that I can have my own farm and able to produce and sell and have my own money.... If he beats me again claiming to have a right to do so because he paid my "DOT\*", I will refund his "DOT" and free myself...."

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\* Editors Note : DOT = dowry



An abandoned woman with two kids in a village in southern Chad declared :

*“...For the first time I enter the building called Justice Court and for the first time I see the judge and a man with black robe standing just next to me and advocating for me, I feel I am someone.... Even if I gain nothing more, I am proud to bring that man here so he can realize I am a human being...Thank you PILC”*

**In your opinion, why is it so important to have female human rights lawyers defending civilians' rights?**

I believe that women are keen to protect human beings as they are the ones who give birth. Usually, they don't tolerate injustice and violence. When they stand up for a cause, they fight for it until they reach the expected results. They are able to turn down any kind of bribes and act professionally to overcome stereotypes and repressions.

**How have you been able to impact or influence women within the legal field?**

I was one of the first 7 women lawyers in Chad. Today, we have more than 15 female lawyers in the country of whom five are committed to human rights defense.

**From your many years of experience, what do you think are the common challenges faced by African female human rights activists and what can they do to overcome them?**

African female human rights activists face stereotypes, repression, discrimination and struggle for survival. To overcome those challenges, they have to first master their job very well, secondly stick to law and principles, third act professional and finally rely on Jesus Christ of Nazareth. I would stress that they must keep themselves away from corruption and from compromised situations that could make them vulnerable.

**Are you mentoring any young African female lawyer to take over from you upon retirement?**

Yes, I have short and long term internship programs. The short term internship program is targeted at law students, to give them the opportunity to know what the work of a human rights lawyer is about and to encourage them to become human rights lawyers. The long term internship program is for youths including women who want to become human rights lawyers.

I also share my experience with women through PILC's internship programs. I prepare my female colleagues to be able to carry on my duties and responsibilities. I am happy to see that some of them are up for the challenge.

**What message would you like to share with women and girls aiming to pursue a career in the field of human rights law?**

I encourage women and girls not to shy away from a human rights activist career. It is a job that presents a lot of challenges, sacrifices and abnegation but it is very noble because it is about defending human rights. It has to be undertaken with heart and consideration for human kind.

Current gender-based discrimination in social institutions fuels a decline of 4.4% in the world average level of life satisfaction.

This shows the potential of gender equality to promote better, happier lives.





# *Interview with DR. ABIOLA MAKINWA*



***Dr. Abiola Makinwa teaches at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. She earned her PhD writing about remedies for corruption and has dedicated her teaching to the same goal.***

**Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your journey within the field of commercial law?**

Who am I? My name is Abiola Makinwa nee Falase, Nigerian/Dutch, born in Moscow, USSR, current role, Principal Lecturer at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. As someone who has lived in many countries and across cultures, my family is my center of gravity.

My journey within the field of commercial law? This has evolved. After completing my Bachelor of Laws, at the University of Ife in 1985, followed by my call to the Bar in 1986, I moved to the University of Lagos to read a Masters in Law. I had not made up my mind what direction I wanted to follow and essentially chose courses spanning public law, private law and jurisprudence!



FILM

FILM NEGATIVE



FILM NEGATIVE



**"I MUST SAY THAT LOOKING BACK, THESE FIRST GENERAL MASTERS GAVE ME THE FOUNDATION TO BE ABLE TO SEE CONNECTIONS ACROSS FIELDS OF LAW AS WELL AS THE NEED FOR A HOLISTIC APPROACH WHEN LOOKING FOR USABLE SOLUTIONS TO SOCIETAL PROBLEMS."**

After obtaining my LL.M, I joined the faculty of the Lagos State University where I eventually rose to the rank of Senior Lecturer. Early in my career it became possible for law lecturers to engage in private practice and I joined the law firm of Olisa Agbakoba and Associates. This was my introduction to the world of commercial practice, with a particular focus on maritime law. I am very grateful for the years I spent in the law firm because it gave perspective to what I was teaching in class. I enjoyed collaborating with fellow practitioners such as the members of the *Women in Maritime Industry Association*, now known as *Wista Nigeria*, and I was instrumental in the founding of the *Institute of Maritime Law* at the Lagos State University.

After moving to the Netherlands for family reasons in 1999, my development in the field of commercial law evolved further through my reading of a second masters (International Business Law) and a subsequent Ph.D. My 2012 Ph.D. thesis was titled *Private Remedies for Corruption, Towards an International Framework*, and this subject has remained the focus of my work as a practitioner and researcher until now.

You were called to the Nigerian Bar in 1986, which means that you became a barrister 35 years ago. How do you feel about this great achievement of experiencing over 3 decades as a lawyer? From your experiences for over 3 decades, what lessons of resilience and tenacity do you have for young female lawyers, or did you have an all rosy and hitch-free career journey?

I would not describe my career journey as all rosy or hitch free. Life happens, and for me, that translated to a new marriage in a new country. I am grateful that life is about 2nd chances and I have been really and truly blessed. However, changing jurisdictions and starting a young family, meant that the clear career path that I would have had, had I stayed in Nigeria was certainly truncated. On the positive side, my departure from the comfort of my Nigerian legal system and practice led me into the fascinating transnational legal framework!

My second masters and then Ph.D. gave me the foundation for a completely new research direction. I became a student again. This morphing into a new version of myself did require an ability to adapt and adjust, to let go of the past and to think creatively about the future. Mine has not been a typical path. But I do not consider this a good or bad thing. It's just been different. I let go of the Abi 1.0 and emerged as Abi 2.0. All good!

This is my key advice to young lawyers. Remain teachable. Whether just starting out or after 35 years! Very often, obstacles or challenges turn out to be doors to great opportunity! Dare to dream. Adjust to new circumstances. Do not let disruptions throw you off course. That's resilience. Let me also let you into a secret. No one I personally know has had a rosy, hitch free, career path. We all have our stories!

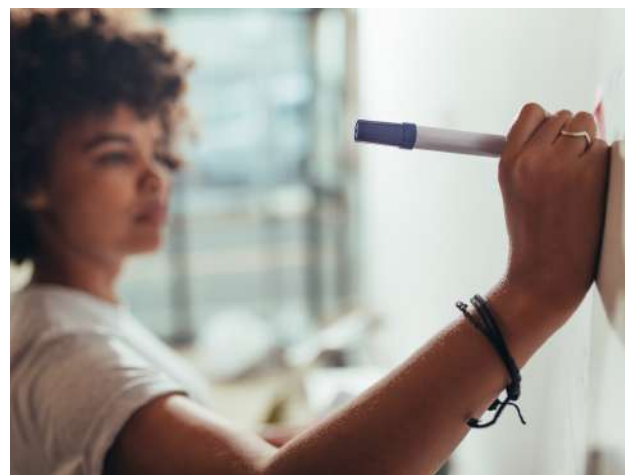
**As a Principal Lecturer at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, what is the most valuable experience you have had?**

My most valuable experience after years of teaching in a research university was entering into the world of 'competence-based' education and what I can describe as market-driven curricula. At THUAS LAW we do not teach Dutch LAW, our diploma is not a qualifying degree for legal practice. So, when I joined the University of Applied Sciences, I underwent a paradigm shift. Up till this point in my career I had trained students to become, ...well, like me ... lawyers. So, the fundamental question I asked myself was, 'what professional role am I training my students for?'

While I was writing my Ph.D., I already had an inkling that fulfilling the emerging prevention-focused approach to anti-corruption would place new obligations on corporations that would require a different cadre of professionals. At THUAS LAW I had the flexibility, provided by the educational mandate of the institution, to develop courses to meet this market driven need. As soon as I joined The Hague University, I set up the course Multinationals and Corruption.

This developed further into the Compliance Minor with a focus on Anti-Money Laundering, Anti Bribery Compliance and Data Protection and Privacy Compliance.

For me, the implication of competence-based education, and market driven curricula goes beyond my work at THUAS. As I quoted when I chaired an 'Africa Knows! It is time to Decolonize Minds' conference panel in 2020, 'the historical legacy of grammar-type schools in many African countries has led to a surfeit of graduates with a lot of theory-based knowledge to the detriment of the competences and skills urgently needed by the rapidly expanding African economy'. The most valuable lesson I have learned at THUAS, as a lawyer with a research university background, is an understanding, of 'competence-based' education as well as the 'nuts and bolts' of how to realize capacity-building, forward-looking, high societal impact, 'competence-based' curricula that provide real job opportunities for my students. This is something we need to take extremely seriously, especially in the African context.



**Your PhD thesis *Private Remedies for Corruption: Towards an International Framework* which was focused on the role of private actors and the importance of public/private dialogue in the fight against corruption and the Future Thinking Essay Award that you have received with your winning essay *Future Thinking through the Prism of International Corruption in 2010* have been an outstanding achievement. Where did your inspiration, interests and curiosity with regard to corruption come from?**

I now have Dutch nationality, but I come from Nigeria. Need I say more? My inspiration comes from the desolation of greed. My inspiration, you could say, is driven by a sense of shame and frustration about where Nigeria is as a country. The loss of hope is a dangerous thing, for a nation, and, especially for its youth. Nigerians are the most creative, hard-working people you could ever meet. So, it is heart-breaking to see the lights go out and hope relinquished in Nigerian youth when we seem stuck in an endless trap of corruption. Beyond Nigeria, I also have many students from countries where corruption is endemic. By far my biggest, most important motivation is to observe my students as I teach and I see the lights begin to go on as they start to think that maybe, just maybe, there is a way out of the corruption conundrum. This is a beautiful thing indeed. We need to tackle the pressure on young people to 'join them' if you cannot beat them. Education is a very powerful tool to change this mindset. Provide students with authentic, realistic alternative strategies of how to fight corruption, that also provide jobs and watch them do the rest. This is my main inspiration.

My path in education also reflects the research path I have taken in the anti-corruption research space. You can summarize it in one sentence. 'Look for ways to bypass the compromised state'. My research is about changing the traditional (compromised) configurations of anti-corruption enforcement. Why? Bribery is a means to an end not an end in itself. Whereas traditional criminal prosecution primarily focuses on the giver and taker of the bribe, my focus is on developing strategies to deal with the 'true costs' of bribery, and the fruits of successful acts of corruption that are by and large untouched by the criminal prosecution process.

Anti-corruption efforts should, in my view, be about ONE THING. Striking where it matters most i.e., against the gains of corruption. Taking the money out of the crime. Also important, is tackling the human factor in white collar crime and closing the gap between what professionals learn in training and what they actually do on the workfield. This means more focus on training that helps professionals to become more resilient and to show moral courage.

**From your perspective, why do you think it is important to have female lawyers within commercial law?**

We think differently. That's my conclusion. Please don't shoot the messenger. I am not a psychologist. This is a conclusion borne of my own life experience. Finding out the 'known unknowns' requires at the very least a diversity of voices and different ways of reasoning or looking at things. Having women in commercial practice or in the boardroom, optimizes and leverages the opportunities generated by stepping out of homogeneity.



Call it what you want, affirmative action or affirmative voices, 'Gender', 'Race', 'Sexual Orientation', 'Socio-economic class'. These very present voices should be included in discussion or policy making. My conclusion is that if you truly seek authentic solutions, whether in practice on big social agenda issues, unless you have a minimum diversity of views and approaches, you are wasting your time in an echo chamber.

**As a woman in the legal profession, what would you say was your biggest driving force to commence and continue your career path and what would your message be to young women who would like to pursue the same career path as you?**

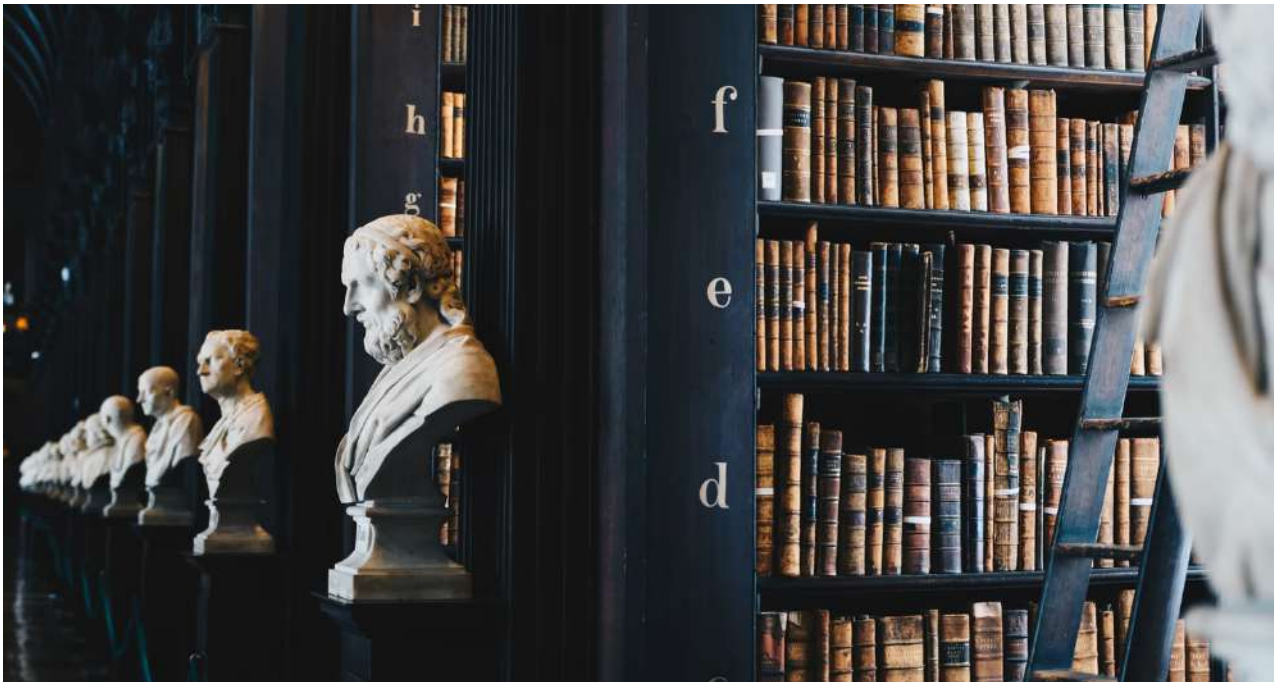
In addition to everything I have said about the motivation for my research and teaching focus I would only add 'be fearless'. Or 'become fearless'. This does not mean becoming loud, or aggressive or arrogant. It does mean having the courage to speak up, to be different, or to go against the flow. Don't be afraid of rejection, pushback or intimidation. Have enough faith in your message and your purpose to be true to yourself. Learn to embrace the put-downs, the negativity, the gaslighting, that often accompanies taking the path less trodden. Actually 'real change' inevitably induces pushback. The way I see it, this is often the best evidence that you *are* on the path. If you hang in there and not give up on the purpose you have figured out is worth pursuing, things will eventually work out (and even if it doesn't you have become an amazon in the battle!). It's easier said than done, I know. This is also a work in progress for me. But let's encourage each other.

**You have been to school in different countries such as Uganda, Nigeria, Switzerland and Italy and lived in Indonesia and the Central African Republic. Have these experiences and intercultural backgrounds made an impact on your position regarding academic / career empowerment of African women?**

I started this interview by referencing my very mobile childhood and my amazing parents. I attended primary schools in Uganda, Nigeria, and Rome. Secondary schools in Rome, Switzerland and Nigeria. University in Nigeria and the Netherlands. I was born in Moscow and now am a citizen of the Netherlands. Interculturality has been my life experience. My parents were the glue that kept my identity together in this 'kaleidoscope world' until I could stand on my own two feet. And what an amazing job they did!

From my parents I have learned the power of education to shape a life regardless of circumstance; to bridge cultures and peoples; to give the confidence to 'meet and greet' at all levels and yet remain completely grounded in oneself. My parents, my first educators, brought a synergy to what could otherwise have been a disorienting and destabilizing childhood.

My childhood experience leaves me with the firm belief that more than anything else we need educators with a mission. This should be the first and most important budgetary priority for any government that is seeking real solutions to social challenges. Educators bring synergies into their student lives. Whatever the starting point, the educator can light a lifelong fire. What a privilege, and how empowering, for both the student and the teacher!



**What were the challenges you faced towards climbing the ladder of success in your career and how were you able to overcome these challenges?**

Hmmm... A position that I thought I was more than qualified for that I did not get is an example that comes to mind. Look, life happens. Whatever the challenge or temporary disappointment, I remind myself about my fundamentals, my priorities, and whether or not these are intact or compromised. I ask myself, am I living in alignment with my values and my commitments to myself? I count the cost of what would really break me and often recognize, with the benefit of hindsight, that some career disappointments were actually blessings in disguise! In other words, roll with the cards you are dealt. Whatever the challenge, don't take it personally, work around it, work with it and keep moving forward!

**In the course of our work, we have come in contact with many African young lawyers looking for opportunities to travel abroad in search of better career opportunities. From your experience, what challenges do you think African female lawyers who plan to migrate to other countries / continents may face and what advice do you have for them?**

If you are looking for a career as a lawyer, then jurisdiction is everything. Unless you want to start from absolute scratch, migrate to a country from the same legal family where you have a familiarity with fundamental principles and concepts. There are of course international law firms, where this does not matter so much, but if you have a choice, try and jump into the biggest entry pool. Pass the qualifying exams in your new jurisdiction which opens up the traditional trajectory for you.

However, and quite frankly, looking at developments in the legal landscape, looking at the changing roles and obligations of corporations, the non-traditional legal market is huge. Use your law degree as a stepping-stone to qualify as a professional in a non-traditional law field where your law background gives you an added value. Go to professional institutes such as the International Compliance Association, or the Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists etc. or to whatever non-traditional law field appeals to you and develop an alternative professional trajectory. Regulatory tech for example is a huge field. Market relevance is your biggest calling card. So, leverage this.

**You are an advocate of Integrity and you believe in encouraging moral agency and integrity in young professionals. What message do you have for young African female lawyers regarding the importance of integrity and good values at the very early stage of their career?**

One of the important findings from the feedback I received from students who completed the Integrity Digital Learning Module that I developed for my THUAS Compliance Minor students, is that for many of them, this was the first time they had been asked to identify their personal core values and to develop a process to give voice to these values. This 'gap' that my students identified is one that I suspect that many of us have.

The way I see it, being caught unprepared is a big driver of compromising on our values. If we are not prepared with a process of ethical decision making, that we have practiced in advance, or if we have not thought out our

counterarguments to situational pressures to 'just allow' or to misleading injunctions such as, 'it's no big deal', 'na your papa get am? Which one you dey?' we may get emotionally overwhelmed into going with the flow.

So, just as we train ourselves to ride a bike or to drive a car, we need to practice responses to ethical challenges using moral reminders, moral reference points and moral commitments, that we have thought out in advance so that we can live a life where our 'actions' match our 'intentions'. It will not happen in one day, but just recognizing the 'gap' and taking steps in this direction is an important step to developing lifelong moral skills that help us to become more morally aware and morally assertive. This is the core objective of the Integrity Digital learning Module (IntegrityDLM) that I developed for my students. It's available at <https://integritydml.net/>. Its free and you are welcome to try it.

**In general, how have you been able to use your position to impact and empower women within your community?**

I have been lucky to have met some really encouraging and inspiring women at different stages of my life. I believe this is the most important gift we can give to one another. Women for women to empower women. Being available to listen to each other's stories with kindness, a listening ear and a willingness to teach and learn! I try my best to live by this truth.

On that note it's been lovely answering your questions. Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts. Wishing you all the very best as you continue with this great initiative!



**“Finding out the ‘known unknowns’ requires at the very least a diversity of voices and different ways of reasoning or looking at things. Having women in commercial practice or in the boardroom, optimizes and leverages the opportunities generated by stepping out of homogeneity.**

**- Abiola Makinwa**



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# INTERVIEW WITH CHINELO EGBUNONU

Chinelo Egbunonu is a Nigerian national, living in Canada. Working as a lawyer supporting black students and keeping a personal website about her experiences, she was named one of Canada's 25 most influential lawyers in 2020.

## **COULD YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO GO INTO STUDYING LAW?**

A part of me feels I was first inspired by the kinds of books I read growing up, such as Sherlock Holmes, Agatha Christie, Mary Higgins Clark, and even watching such shows as the Third Eye by Olu Jacobs. Ultimately, I think some of my experiences growing up, seeing injustice and feeling powerless in the face of it inspired to aspire to a position of authority, where I can wield my knowledge for good.

## **ALSO, PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE STORY ABOUT YOUR LEGAL CAREER BEFORE YOU STARTED YOUR MASTERS.**

Not sure the kind of story to tell exactly. I knew I wanted to do my Masters outside Nigeria, but I could not afford it. I had applied to schools in the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia and even South Africa. While I'd get admission, I would not get enough (or any) funding. I had put in my application to Dalhousie and told myself it would be my final attempt.



I applied late, way beyond the scholarship deadline, and remember writing a long letter to explain why my application came late. To be honest, I hardly expected to get the scholarship. I was pleasantly surprised when it came, and although visa delays made me defer for a year, I am thankful for that opportunity, which changed the trajectory of my life.

## **IN 2013, YOU EARNED YOUR MASTER'S DEGREE IN BUSINESS LAW AT DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY. WHAT LED YOU TO STUDY BUSINESS LAW?**

I had started out my law practice as a Criminal Litigation and Human Rights lawyer, but over time, I gradually pivoted to commercial practice

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and business law, because I needed to pay my bills. However, I kept volunteering (and keep volunteering till this day) with humanitarian and advocacy causes. By the time I applied for my Masters in business law, I was pretty established as a business lawyer.

**FOR YOUR MASTERS YOU MOVED FROM NIGERIA TO CANADA. WHAT MAJOR CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE AS AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT, HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM AND WHAT WOULD BE YOUR CANDID ADVICE TO AFRICAN FEMALE YOUNG LAWYERS WHO WISH TO TRAVEL ABROAD IN PURSUIT OF FURTHER STUDIES OR CAREER DEVELOPMENT?**

The challenges I faced were quite multi-faceted. First was the culture shock of saying good-morning to people, and having them stare right through you, as if you did not speak. It took me a little bit of getting used to. I also felt the absence of the community I was used to, now being in a place where people who looked and talked like me were far in the minority. Finally, hearing for the first time in my life that I was overqualified for jobs I applied to, so the only jobs 'offered' to me were menial and lower-income jobs.

One thing that helped was building a close community of friends, they were my safe place and I could be myself around them. I also tapped into the network from my siblings already in Canada at the time, and connected to other people through them. When I moved back to Canada in 2017, I also did things a bit differently. I did a little more research to understand how better to get into the legal workforce, and it paid off.

Volunteering was my in-road, and I pretty much built up all of my own networks through volunteering.

My advice to African female young lawyers would be to do a little more research about the community they are moving to, reach out to potential mentors already there in a field same or similar to theirs (or even in entirely different fields), and be ready to volunteer genuinely.

To be honest, my blog was borne out of the boredom I faced after my Masters, without landing a job for a while. With time however, it grew into being a major outlet for my voice, and has helped me grow as a human, as well as given me a lot of positive visibility. You could call it my brand now.

**ON YOUR WEBSITE, YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF AS "MAVERICK, NERD, STORYTELLER, ADVOCATE". ARE THOSE ASPECTS OF YOURSELF MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE OR IS THE ADVOCATE TELLING STORIES OCCASIONALLY?**

*(Laughs out loud)* I don't think all these components of my persona are mutually exclusive; they all complement each other and make up the sum-total of who I am. For example, part of your job as a lawyer is to weave compelling stories, be it in the courtroom, or while negotiating a deal. The only thing is considering the seriousness of my day job, the more serious parts of me are a bit more at the fore at work.





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**IN A BLOG ARTICLE FROM 2018, YOU TALK ABOUT THE SUPPORT YOU HAVE RECEIVED FROM YOUR COMMUNITY DURING YOUR CAREER. WHAT WAS THE GREATEST LESSON YOU LEARNED FROM ASKING FOR SUPPORT AND RECEIVING THE SAME? WHAT MESSAGE SHOULD AFRICAN FEMALE LAWYERS AT THE EARLY STAGE OF THEIR CAREERS DRAW FROM THIS EXPERIENCE OF YOURS?**

The greatest lesson I learnt, which would also double as my advice to young female African lawyers like me is: never be afraid to ask for help. You could be drowning, and no one will know if you do not speak up. For every door or so closed in your face when you reach out, there are ten more willing to open and help you. You may not get a job or monetary assistance straight out, but relationships to me is the best asset anyone could have. Focus on developing and building formidable relationships through networking and volunteering, and everything else will fall into place with time.

**IN 2016, YOU HELD A TED TALK, CHALLENGING YOUR AUDIENCE TO MOVE AWAY FROM "THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX". WHAT IS IT YOU CRITICISE ABOUT THAT PHRASE, AND HOW WOULD YOU ADVISE YOUNG AFRICAN LAW STUDENTS OF LAW TO GO BEYOND IT?**

Actually, the Ted Talk was in September or November 2016 (it seems like a lifetime ago!). If my memory serves me right, I believe what I talked about, which I still agree with, is that sometimes, the phrase "think outside the box" seems to suggest you just climb out of certain labels or restrictions once in a while, make a point or take a specific action, then go back to living within the confines of the box.

I believe the point of what I was making is that sometimes, you may need to chart a unique path, devoid of boxes or labels entirely. You may be the first to do it, and it may seem strange to others. But if you have a vision in your heart and mind of what it is you aim to achieve, then stay true to it, irrespective of the fact that it does not conform with already existing boxes, labels or paths.

I would apply this to young Africans like me, who might find themselves suddenly in non-traditional career paths, with hardly many precedents for what they seek to achieve.

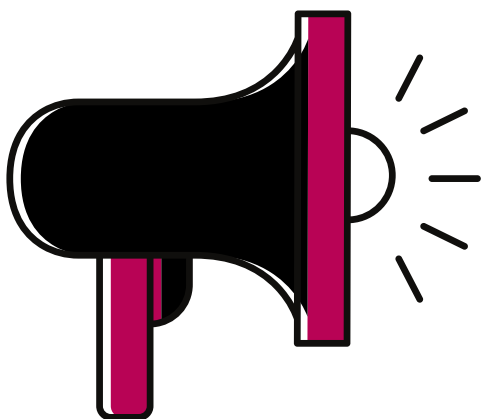
**"IT MAY TAKE SOME TIME AND A LOT OF EFFORT TO OVERCOME THE PREJUDICES THAT COME WITH BEING 'DIFFERENT', BUT DO YOU ANYWAY AND STAY TRUE TO YOUR DREAMS."**



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**IN THAT SAME TED TALK, YOU CONTRAST THE GLASS CEILING IN SOME CULTURES WITH A “WOODEN CEILING” IN OTHERS. WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE FOR WOMEN TO CHALLENGE BOTH THE GLASS AND WOODEN CEILING?**

Ceilings are ceilings, they may be more visible in ‘wooden’ forms, and quite easier to identify and tackle, or much more subtle in ‘glass’ forms, requiring a little bit more ingenuity in addressing them. I would say that irrespective of the type of ceiling in so far as it stands in the path of a woman (or anyone actually) achieving their full potential while re-enforcing inequalities, it is good to seek to break those ceilings. Not just for one’s self, but for the generations after. Now HOW you break the ceilings is a different matter, and usually depends on the particular circumstances. You may need a hammer or a bulldozer in certain instances to literally force your path. And in others, it may require very intellectual, highly skilled prowess to surmount them. Irrespective of what the case is, it helps to build on the successes of others, while acknowledging the shoulders of the women before you that you have climbed on to achieve successes, and sending the elevator back down for other women to go even higher than yourself.



**IN AUGUST 2021, YOU BECAME THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE BLACK FEMALE LAWYERS NETWORK. WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE WITH YOUR WORK THERE, AND HOW HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO IMPACT OR INFLUENCE BLACK WOMEN IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION?**

I didn’t start my practice in Canada through the traditional route of going to law school, summer-internships and articling before being called to the bar. I had no ‘lawyer’ connections or network, and felt very much like a fish out of water when I returned to go through the licensing process.

The Black Female Lawyers Network (BFLN) gave me a much-needed sense of belonging and a safe space to interact with other lawyers genuinely, ask questions without feeling silly, and learn more about the community. Seeing over 200 accomplished black female legal professionals together in one place during the annual Sistahs-In-Law Retreat gave me so much strength, I have learnt from these women valuable lessons on navigating the legal work space as a black woman, even down to things such as negotiating my place within an organization. Now as Vice-President of BFLN, I hope to do my bit to ensure we keep the flame burning, that women like us have a safe place to grow, to be mentored, and to give back to the society through volunteering. My ‘influence’ over black women in the society – if any – is something I’d consider a work in progress. I continue to use my voice via my blog, my work with BFLN, and mentoring as many other black female legal professionals as I can.

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**THE BLACK FEMALE LAWYERS NETWORK WORKS WITH STUDENTS. WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE FOR LAW STUDENTS OF AFRICAN DESCENT WHO AIM FOR A CAREER IN BUSINESS LAW?**

My advice would be to be prepared to be very open-minded in learning not just the law side of things, but also the actual business side of things, as well getting more tech-savvy, and understanding real-life risk management on the business side. Law does not exist in a vacuum, you need to be able to understand (sell even) the business you are 'lawyering' for. Seek internships, as much as possible, not just because you want it to look cute on your resume, but because you need to grasp a foundational understanding of how actual business works. Again, volunteer. I cannot extol the benefits of volunteering enough. Volunteer genuinely, not just to 'look good', but to contribute your quota to making our society better. You'd be surprised the growth and invaluable life lessons you would gain from volunteering.

**IN 2021, YOU WERE NAMED ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL 25 CANADIAN LAWYERS. CONGRATULATIONS ON THAT ACHIEVEMENT. THE CANADIAN LAWYER MAGAZINE HIGHLIGHTS YOUR WORK AS FINANCE TRANSACTIONS COUNSEL AT CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION.**

**WHAT LED YOU TO THIS POSITION?**

I could say that all of my experience in Infrastructure Development, Finance Transactions, Project Management, Commercial Transactions et al over the years prepared me for the role. In truth however, I believe it took

someone who was able to look beyond the non-traditional background I had, see the wealth of experience under my belt, and envision the potentials I could birth if given the opportunity. Considering that the role ties into my personal aspirations of helping the indigent in the society, and I get to do interesting work in providing affordable housing for Canadians, you could call it a match made in heaven.

**HAVING ACHIEVED THESE MILESTONES IN YOUR CAREER, WHAT IS NEXT?**

If there is one thing the last two years have taught us all, it is that

**EVEN THE BEST-LAID PLANS CAN GET UP-ENDED AT ANY TIME. I AM LEARNING TO LIVE IN THE MOMENT, AND TAKE ON EACH CHALLENGE AS THE DAY BRINGS IT.**

I hope to continue to contribute my own quota to the development of young (black) women every little way I can.

**WHAT IS YOUR FINAL MESSAGE TO YOUNG LAWYERS OF AFRICAN DESCENT WHO LOOK UP TO YOU AS A ROLE MODEL?**

Keep pushing, keep pressing. Don't give up. Keep believing in yourself, and everything will work out for the best.





I encourage women and girls not to shy away from a human rights activist career. It is a job that presents a lot of challenges, sacrifices and abnegation but it is very noble because it is about defending human rights. It has to be undertaken with heart and consideration for human kind.

- Delphine Djiraïbé

# Interview With

## EVELYN ANKUMAH



Evelyn Ankumah is a human rights lawyer and author. In her most recent publication *Hague Girls*, she talks about her own story, having to leave her native Ghana because of her work. She now lives in The Netherlands, mentoring lawyers and working with her organisation Africa Legal Aid.



**Thank you so much for taking the time and being here. Would you like to tell us a little bit about your journey towards law? What inspired you to go into law?**

Let's just say I was always very interested in debating and discussing. I also love to write. Writing has also been part of my journey as a lawyer. But then, more importantly, I became a human rights lawyer. And I didn't even realize until much later when I was being interviewed for some magazine many years ago that perhaps the coup-prone Ghana that I grew up in made me go into human rights. You know I grew up in Ghana at a time when there were many military coups. I remember when I was seven years old I was standing in front of the sound system in our living room when a colonel in the army made his announcement that the (democratically elected government) had been removed from office. The colonel was himself subsequently removed by a General in his government in a peaceful palace coup.

And then there was a very bloody coup in 1979, The June Fourth Revolution led by junior army officers. I actually wrote about it a bit in the book to give context to certain experiences. All three former heads of state and other high ranking military officials were executed by firing squad. The head of state that was overthrown in the revolution was General Akuffo. I happened to know his daughters. We attended the same primary school and I had seen him up close when my siblings and I went to a birthday party of one of his daughters at their official residence. He joined the party at some point and cracked jokes and made us all laugh. There were other kids in our school whose fathers were executed by firing squad just weeks after the revolution. And in addition to that, there was so much unrest in the country with people chanting 'let the blood flow'. After a short time there were elections. Later, I won a youth essay competition and went to the Netherlands on a cultural exchange programme.

At the same time, I am proudly aware that Ghana was the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to gain its independence. The freedom fighter and Ghana's first President Dr Kwame Nkrumah, I quote him declared independence: 'At long last, the battle has ended, and thus Ghana, your beloved country is free forever'. Nkrumah brought dignity to Africans, in fact, to black people everywhere.

So, I think those experiences and Africa's history had something to do with why I knew I wanted to be, not just a lawyer, but a human rights lawyer.

**You mentioned your book, *Hague Girls*, which was published this month. First of all, congratulations. From what I understand, it really talks about your story and how you were able to overcome all the obstacles thrown in your way. Could you talk about the book a little more? Who did you write it for? What inspired you to write it?**

*Hague Girls, Part one: Fleeing* is the book I had to write, not the book that I wanted to write. It was very painful, difficult to relive those experiences. I do love to write but this was about an injustice done to me, both personally and professionally. A journalist in the Netherlands called when he read the description of the book and asked: 'Is this fiction?' I told him it is a true story and that my husband who's chair of a department at a law faculty in the Netherlands is also part of the story.

Who did I write it for? I wrote it for everyone. I know that sounds cliché. But it is a human-interest story, a story that had to be told, and so I told it. One of the reviewers wrote that: *it brings perspective to a story once told in hushed tones in international justice circles*. So, the story was out there. This is the first time that I have told my side of the story. And I had people ask me about the story before. But it is not something I could tell just over dinner so I wrote this book. And even people who knew the story, or parts of it and were very supportive didn't get the full story until they read the book.

Let it be known that even though I am a human rights lawyer, and an advocate '*against all matters of unfairness and cruelty*' to quote another reviewer, I also encountered these things. I work with victims and survivors, listening to their stories and not telling my own story. When the blurb of my book came out, and I shared it with some of the survivors that we work with - mostly young women who they become mentees of sorts – one of them said: 'wow, I could never have imagined you in a vulnerable situation'. I felt like a hypocrite addressing their challenges and not talking about my story.



**‘At long last, the battle has ended,  
and thus Ghana, your beloved  
country is free forever’.**

**You mentioned being a mentor of sorts to young women, and I can assume that with the broad spectrum of work- for example, you've published many books, there are more than just the survivors that see you as some sort of a mentor. Now, looking back at your career so far, if a young African woman interested in law, would come to you, as a matter of fact, many come to us, and ask for advice on how to enter the stage of international human rights law, what would you tell her?**

I'll tell her she needs to be prepared. She needs to study for it, and she needs to add law to her studies. These days a bachelor's degree is not enough, you need more. I have had interns who did their first degree in international justice but then you have to see where else you take it. And then once they have their degrees, do some internships. Try out different things in the field of human rights and international justice. And also find some mentors, ask people for advice, just stay in touch even after you've done your internship or internships. So first be prepared - get the right education, get some experience, do a few internships. I know that can be a challenge because many of these internships are unpaid, so sometimes you have to combine it with other positions. That is doable, but you really have to decide what is more important at any given time.

**You already mentioned your organization in passing, AFLA, could you tell us more about how it came into being? And what made you decide to set up this inspiring organization?**

I wanted to be a human rights lawyer and I got the opportunity to write the first book on the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. At the time I was a research scholar at Maastricht University. As part of my research I attended the sessions of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. And before the sessions, I would go to the Secretariat of the Commission to help out. I realized how much help the Commission needed. They received many complaints they had to deal with. And they wanted to know how other human rights bodies dealt with similar situations. I practiced law briefly in Minnesota and so I knew that a good lawyer could educate a judge. Amnesty International would submit complaints to the Commission but would not refer to the provisions in the African Charter on Human and People's Rights because they believed the Charter's provisions fell short of recognized human rights standards.

I thought they should rather have used their complaint to argue for a progressive interpretation of the Charter as stipulated in Article 60 of the Charter:

*‘The Commission shall draw inspiration from international law on human and peoples’ rights, particularly from the provisions of various African instruments on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the Charter of the United Nations, the Charter of the Organisation of African Unity, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, other instruments adopted by the United Nations and by African countries in the field of Human and Peoples’ Rights, as well as from the provisions of various instruments adopted within the Specialised Agencies of the United Nations of which the Parties to the present Charter are members’.*

So, my idea was to start a human rights organization which among other things would submit well prepared and well-reasoned complaints to the African Commission. And then came the Pinochet case, where a Spanish magistrate, Baltasar Garzon, indicted former Chilean leader Augusto Pinochet for human rights violations committed in Chile and had Pinochet arrested in London. This triggered discussions on universal jurisdiction. That was intriguing. I thought ‘what would that mean for Africa’? So, we started exploring that. Under the auspices of AFLA, The **Cairo Arusha Principles on Universal Jurisdiction in Respect of Gross Human Rights Violations: an African Perspective** were adopted. Just around that same time the ICC statute entered into force. AFLA has a strong presence in the human rights and international justice landscape.

**We talked about the work with your organization, your books and publications. You mentioned platforms. And our target group is African women, of course with the subject of this magazine, African women interested in law. What would you say, with your platform, how have you managed to empower African women? And how have you used your position to influence how African women are seen both in the legal world but also on the international stage in general?**

On our website ([africalegalaid.com](http://africalegalaid.com)), we have this tool, an e-reporter. We use it for various things, advocacy mainly. We want to see women, African women, represented in high places. We have advocated in support of African women seeking high level international positions. It’s about representation. And there are many young women, not only African, who participate in our internship programme, which I think is great. Because when you have non-Africans participate, you are also sensitizing them. Because at the end of the day we just want to have a lovely, peaceful world to live in. AFLA contributes African perspectives to the evolving regime of human rights and international justice. I learned very early on that both Africans and non-Africans must be engaged in contributing African perspectives, because otherwise you’re just preaching to the converted. Just like with the discourse on equality of women and gender justice, men must be engaged as well. Of course, women need their safe space to engage.

AFLA has a project on gender sensitive judging for ICC judges and judges of other international courts and tribunals. It's not like a woman becomes a judge – or even president of the court – and suddenly all her problems go away. In *the Hague Girls* series I tell the story of the first female president of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), an African American woman who was almost arrested by the Court security because she was mistaken for a trespasser. There's also the story of an African judge of an international court who was mistaken for a cleaning lady.

**Could you tell us: what keeps you going, what is at the core of your work now? What is the message you wish to put out into the world?**

**"Courage – persistence, building capacity, empowerment. I believe that victims who have suffered crimes in the most remote parts of the world, most remote villages, should be seen and heard at national, regional and international levels. "**

They should be engaged in the justice process. And so we have brought victims and survivors to engage at the yearly sessions of the Assembly of States Parties to the ICC, and to the African Union.

We especially build capacity of women, young women in particular. Most of the people in my team are women, and I'd like to think that we inspire young women.





# My Journey.

Written by  
Rumbidzai Lorraine Mudzongo



My name is Rumbidzai Lorraine Mudzongo and I am a 20-year-old Zimbabwean woman. I am currently studying at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, pursuing an International and European Law degree. I moved to the Netherlands in August 2020. I chose to move here because I had the understanding that The Hague is considered as the City of Peace and Justice, and what better place to study for an international law degree than here? The Netherlands also offered affordable tuition and living costs, a student-friendly environment, and an overall great opportunity to explore different career options after I finish my degree.

My first-year university experience was greatly affected by the pandemic. Due to the restrictions in place at the time I was only able to go to classes physically once or twice a week with the rest of my classes being online. Although I was able to form a strong bond with my tutoring group it was very difficult to make connections with classmates because I only saw a handful of them when they turned on their cameras during lectures. I do believe that I made the best out of the situation by joining a student-led magazine as a writer, this enabled me to engage in a hobby that I love but to also make great connections with other students.

My experience studying law so far has been a challenging but exciting adventure. Although I have only been studying for a year and only covered the basics of several courses such as Criminal law and Corporate law, I can gladly say that I do not regret choosing this degree. The workload has sometimes been more than I thought I could handle but with the support of my lecturers and fellow classmates, I have managed to successfully complete my first year with good grades. The law field is wide and offers many different paths. It is, however, a degree that requires discipline, dedication and ambition. I would encourage anyone wanting to pursue a degree in law to consider the time it takes to eventually become a practicing lawyer, and the work and effort it will take not only to pursue the degree but also to get the relevant work experience and knowledge.

One of my biggest achievements, so far, was applying for and being awarded the Holland Scholarship. Applying for scholarships is an important aspect to consider when choosing to study abroad. This can make a big difference as there are many costs to consider besides tuition, accommodation and food. I admit I was very hesitant to apply because I felt that there would be more qualified and even more deserving applicants, and I almost did not apply! I realised that I would be doing myself a disservice by not at least taking the chance to be considered. Not only did being awarded this scholarship give me a great financial boost but it also opened me up to connecting with the other winners of the scholarship and an even wider network of alumni that will be a great asset in the future.

I am grateful that since starting this journey, I have not faced many struggles or hurdles. Whilst I did have some trouble adjusting to a new environment, language, weather and overall system, it was no more than anyone would experience moving to a foreign country to start a new life. One of the struggles I did face moving abroad for university, right after finishing high school, was having to learn to live on my own and take charge of my life. Very early on I struggled with coming up with a proper monthly budget, spending money wisely, being organised and managing my time to juggle my school work and my home duties of cooking and cleaning. Although my parents had always encouraged and pushed me to do all these things at home, it was completely different having to do it by myself with no supervision! With some ups and downs and some mistakes here and there, I can safely say that I have now learnt to be self-reliant and responsible.



Another challenge I faced and still do was the language barrier. Although everyone I have interacted with both in and out of university speaks and understands English, it has been a challenge adapting to having to translate everything from Dutch to English.

*"It is a daunting experience to move to a country where English is not the native language or the language you are used to speaking daily, it can be scary to interact with people whether socially or when you need assistance."*

However, there are many opportunities to learn the language even at a very basic level to be able to have day-to-day interactions, and over time you begin to learn and understand some words and phrases that can be helpful.

My hope after my degree is to pursue a Masters degree and eventually become a practising lawyer. Whether I will remain here in The Netherlands or return to Zimbabwe to achieve this is something that I will decide in the future. As I enter into my second year of studies and reflect on my journey so far, I am happy to say that I do not have many regrets! Moving to the Netherlands has been a great experience and I hope that as I am entering into a new phase of my life and journey I will continue to grow and have amazing experiences and opportunities!






**In recent decades, the number of women in the judiciary has significantly increased worldwide. In many countries around half of law students are women, and 2014 data shows that women in OECD countries make up more than 54% of professional judges.**







# Andromeda Anyan details the impact of COVID-19 on her journey

COVID-19 impacted my student life and me like any other student worldwide. It is not quite usual for me to follow my program online and not have contact with my peers or not be familiar with the faces of my peers for the academic year. I gradually became less motivated to follow my seminars consistently. Sitting behind your laptop at home with no social contact becomes mentally narcotic at some point. Isolated from your friends, separated from your usual spots to relax, or study, and simply having to cope with the fact that I am in an actual global pandemic.

In October 2020, I was notified by my college that applications were opened to participate in the 2021 New York National Model United Nations (NY-NMUN) Conference. And if the COVID measures allowed it, we could perform this simulation in the United Nations Headquarters, meaning that we would travel and be accommodated in the Big Apple of the U.S.! NMUN conferences are held annually in New York City and Washington, DC. These conferences strive to provide attending delegates, such as myself, knowledge, skills, and experience applicable both during and after my university experience. In December 2020, we (the students selected to participate in the NMUN) started researching, writing, legal analysis and getting our preparation for the Conference that would take place in April 2021.

Sadly, the COVID measures did not get any better in the U.S., making the NMUN held online. It was a huge bummer as I was excited to be in the UN Headquarters and hold debates with students from all over the world. It would have been an incredible experience for me to practice my legal presentation in real life. All in all, I still had a great experience all together. The researching, getting to know a country you have no association with and representing them during a global conference. Due to my performance, together with my colleague-delegate, I am honoured to have been the delegate of Tunisia in the UNESCO Committee and win the Best Position Paper Award and the Distinguished Conference Delegation Award.

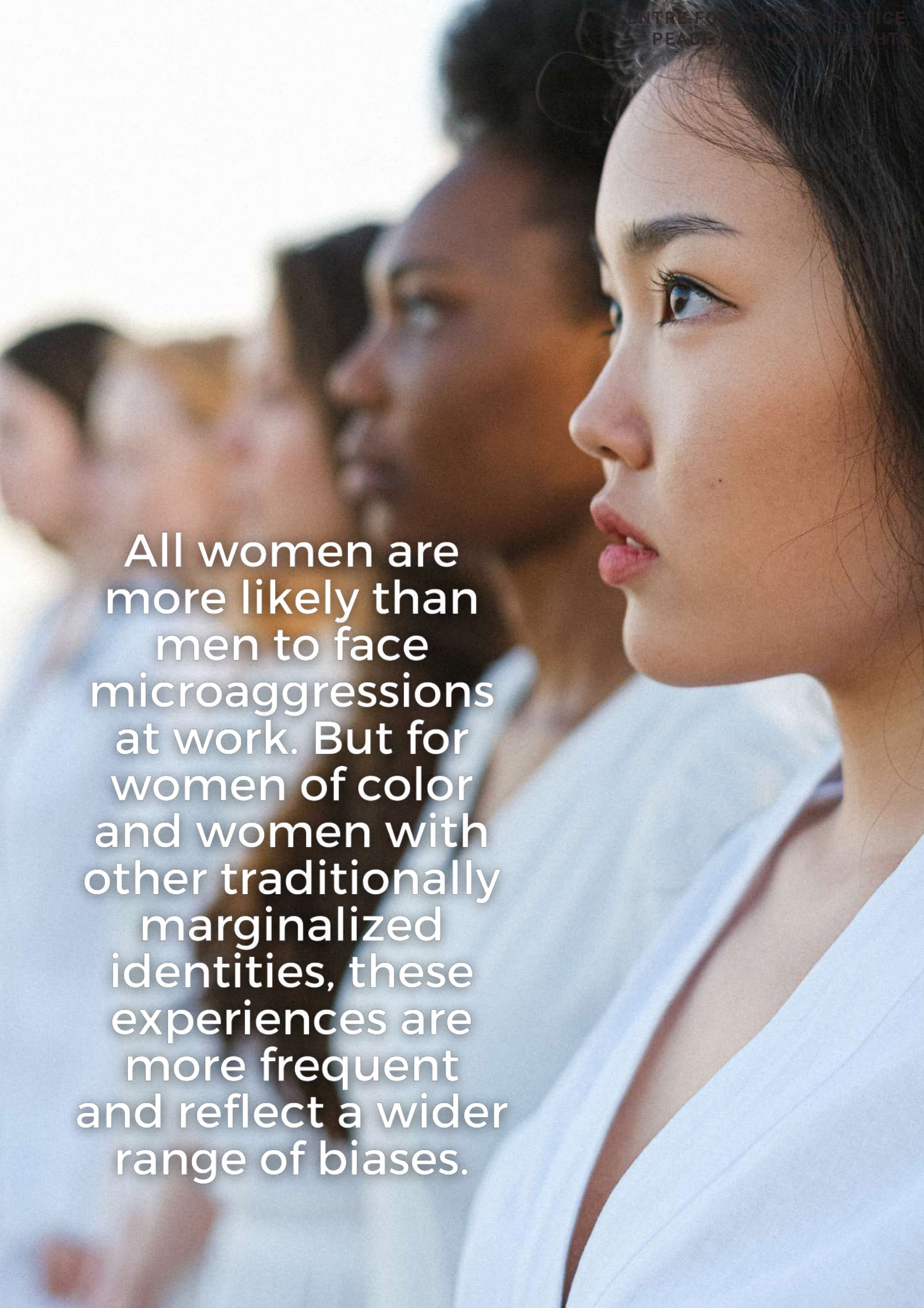
Albeit the loss of motivation for my studies, the moment we were able to go outside again and gradually restart our “normal” lives,

**"I came out rebuilt, renewed and  
with a different type of energy and  
mentality than before the lockdown  
in the Netherlands. "**

I gained a desire for young people to grab every opportunity in their student life and let those opportunities boost them to grow in their personal and professional lives. I involved myself in projects and organisations to gain new skills to my advantage in the (near) future.





A photograph of a group of women, likely healthcare workers, wearing white lab coats. They are shown in profile, looking towards the right side of the frame. The woman in the foreground is a young woman with dark hair and light skin, looking off-camera with a focused expression. Behind her, several other women of various ethnicities are visible, slightly out of focus. The background is bright and blurred, suggesting an outdoor or well-lit indoor setting.

All women are more likely than men to face microaggressions at work. But for women of color and women with other traditionally marginalized identities, these experiences are more frequent and reflect a wider range of biases.



WOMEN'S ECONOMIC  
EMPOWERMENT INCLUDES  
WOMEN'S ABILITY TO  
PARTICIPATE EQUALLY IN  
EXISTING MARKETS; THEIR  
ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER  
PRODUCTIVE RESOURCES,  
ACCESS TO DECENT WORK,  
CONTROL OVER THEIR OWN  
TIME, LIVES AND BODIES; AND  
INCREASED VOICE, AGENCY AND  
MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN  
ECONOMIC DECISION-MAKING  
AT ALL LEVELS FROM THE  
HOUSEHOLD TO INTERNATIONAL  
INSTITUTIONS.

-UN WOMEN



# *Diversity Spices Life!*

By Honorable Ari Tobi-Aiyemo

From across sub-Saharan deserts in Africa  
I came to the Atlantic shores of America  
I sojourn to land of leisure  
Yet I recall my home of pleasure  
With so much nostalgia

From the west sides of Africa  
To the north sides of America  
I come in search  
But see a wretch  
From the east coast  
To the west coast  
Yet I recall my home coast

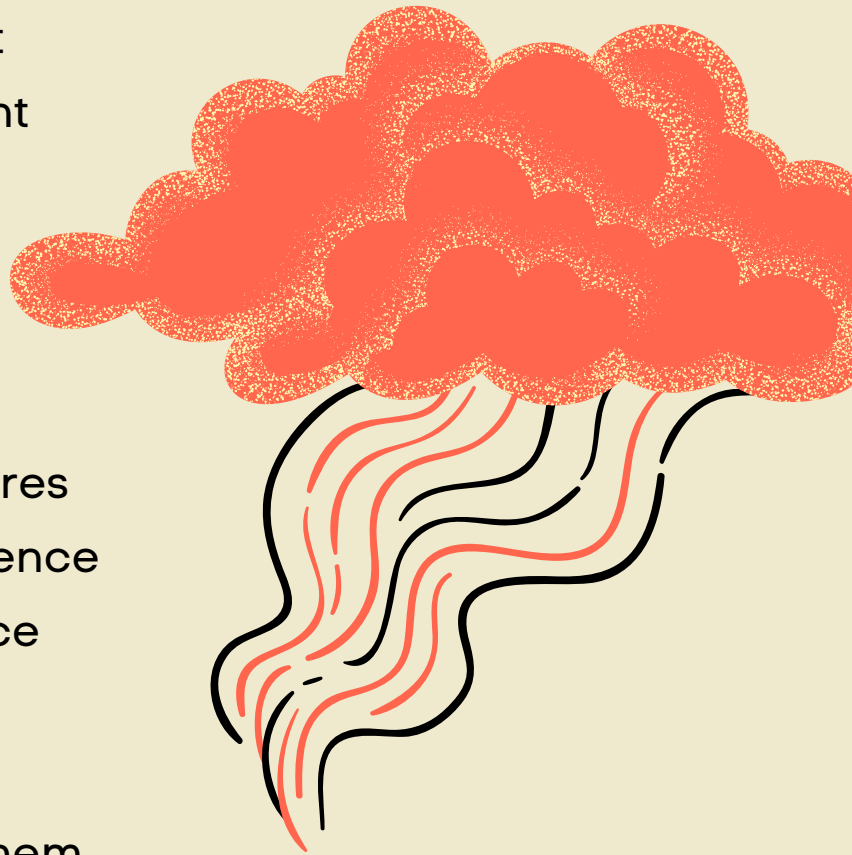


How do I live in a land so different  
And remain independent  
Our thoughts are different  
Our views are different

Varied are our cultures  
And human virtues  
Still I recall home measures  
Then I encounter experience  
That echo's remembrance  
Diversity spices life!

You do not understand them  
They do not understand you  
If they are wrong  
Then you are wrong  
If they are right  
Then you are right  
The way you see them  
Is the way they see you  
They have their ways  
You have your ways  
Yet! Diversity spices life

So!





If I accept them for whom they are  
They will accept me here  
If I accept the culture here  
I will stay with leisure  
And still recall my home of pleasure  
This time without nostalgia  
Diversity spices life

Back home in Africa  
A land of community  
Be your brother's keeper  
Here in the United States of America  
The land of liberty  
You are your own keeper

We may not have the same culture  
Still we understand leisure leads to pleasure  
A taste of difference brings appreciation  
And not judgment or condemnation  
Live and let live

Diversity spices life!

*Honorable Ari Tobi-Aiyemo*

**Thursday the 15th of February 2018**

Presented in the 9th Student Diversity Leadership conference, State University of New York (SUNY) Oneonta. February 29, 2020. Also published in the Program of the University of Nevada Diversity week, 2018







**Increasing  
women's and girls'  
educational  
attainment  
contributes to  
women's economic  
empowerment and  
more inclusive  
economic growth.**

**- UN WOMEN**



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