



African Women Chief Justices



A Digital Archive Series
(Vol. 2: 2008-2015)



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WOMEN CHIEF JUSTICES

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

Details of their profiles can be found in the
Pioneer Women in Law Project:

<https://www.africanwomeninlaw.com/pioneers>



Maria do Céu Silva Monteiro (Guinea Bissau)

President, Supreme Court of Justice of Guinea-Bissau, 2008-2012

Maria do Céu Monteiro was elected President of the Supreme Court of Justice of Guinea-Bissau. She was elected in 2004 after the post had been unoccupied for 2 years and held the position until December 2012. She was awarded a scholarship to Portugal for a law degree from the Faculty of Law of the University of Coimbra. Later, she entered the Center for Judicial Studies in Lisbon - C.E.J, for a postgraduate degree in Judicial Magistracy. She has a Master's in Legal and Constitutional Sciences, and a second Master's in Constitutional juridical Sciences, and as of 2021, she is finishing up a Ph.D.

She served as a judge in Guinea-Bissau prior to her election as Supreme Court Judge by nine senior judges from 2004-2013. She also served as President of the Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African Countries (ECOWAS), a position she held from 2014-2016.

Judge Maria is a woman of many firsts. The first woman magistrate and judge in Guinea Bissau. The first Portuguese-speaking citizen to preside over the ECOWAS Court of Justice. The first and only one woman to join the First Technical Commission for the Review Constitutional in Guinea Bissau; the first woman to preside over the Guinean Magistrates Union; and the first woman to preside over the Guinean Women's Association of Jurists.



Umu Hawa Tejan-Jalloh (Sierra Leone)

Chief Justice, 2008-2015

Umu Hawa Tejan-Jalloh was appointed and approved by the House of Parliament to act as the first woman Chief Justice for Sierra Leone. Her Lady Justice, Tejan-Jalloh was born in Sierra Leone and attended secondary school at the Harford Secondary School for Girls in Moyamba and the St. Edwards Secondary School in King Tom, Freetown. Justice Umu Hawa Tejan-Jalloh holds a Bachelor of Arts degree (History and Political Science) from Columbia University, New York City, N.Y. USA in 1971. Immediately after her graduation from Columbia University she pursued a career in Law at the College of Law, London, and did her Post Finals at the Council of Legal Education in London. In November 1974, she was called to the Bar of the Honorable Society of Gary's Inn. In 1987, she was sponsored together with other commonwealth students by the British Council to pursue a course at the Institute of Advanced Legal Education, University of London, in International Law, Public Law, Legislative and Treaty Drafting.

She started her career as a State Counsel but would later be promoted to the post of Senior State Counsel and Principal State Counsel after that. She would be appointed as a High Court Judge in 1995. Tejan-Jalloh became a Fellow of the Commonwealth Judicial Institute in Halifax, Canada, in 2000 while serving as a High Court Judge. In 2004 she was promoted to the Appeals Court. In January 2007, her excellence in the judicial bench led her to be approved by the Parliament to become a Supreme Court Judge, one of the very few women in Sierra Leone to do so at that time, thus setting the stage for her eventual appointment as the Chief Justice. Uma Hawa Tejan has always been known to be a very exceptional judge.

During her tenure as a High Court Judge, she gained a reputation for justly applying the law without fear or favor. Stories of her enduring harrowing journeys through risky highways under threats of rebel ambushes to held courts in northern Sierra Leone around the same time showed her commitment to serving the people of her nation in delivering justice. Her work has garnered her numerous awards and recognitions both in her native country as well as internationally. She was made an honorary citizen of Little Rock, the hometown of former American president Bill Clinton. She would then become a Goodwill Ambassador of Arkansas. Tejan-Jalloh was also awarded the Grand Commander of the Order of the Rokel, one of the highest National Honours in Sierra Leone.



Aloma Mariam Mukhtar (Nigeria)

Chief Justice, 2012-2014

Aloma Mariam Mukhtar was born in Lagos on November 20, 1944. She attended Gibson & Welder Law School and graduated in 1966 before being called to the English Bar in the same year.

She was called to the Nigerian Bar in 1967. She joined the Northern Nigerian Ministry of Justice as a Pupil State Counsel and Magistrate, becoming the first female magistrate in the North Eastern Government from 1969-1973. In 1973, she moved to Kano State to be the Chief Registrar of the State Judiciary, and five years later, she was appointed a judge of the High Court of Kano State.

Justice Mukhtar was nominated as the Justice for the Court of Appeals of Nigeria in 1987. She served in this position for 17 years, 12 years of which she served as President. In June 2005, she was promoted to the Supreme Court of Nigeria from the Court of Appeals. From there, in 2012, Honorable Justice Mukhtar was elevated to the Chief Justice position of Nigeria until 2014 when she reached the mandatory retirement age of 70. Additionally, she served as a Justice of the Supreme Court of The Gambia from 2011-2012, in an interim position.

Throughout her career, Honorable Justice Mukhtar was the first woman to be the attorney for Northern Nigeria, the first female Chief Registrar of Kano State Judiciary, the first female judge for the High Court in Kano State, and the first female jurist to be appointed to both the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of Nigeria. She then became the first female Chief Justice for Nigeria. After leaving the Supreme Court of Nigeria, the Honorable Justice joined the National Council of State, the highest advisory body in Nigeria, as the first female permanent member.

Read more: <https://www.africanwomeninlaw.com/african-women-in-law/Aloma-Mariam-Mukhtar>



Kadidiatou Abdoulaye Ly Diori (Niger)

President, Constitutional Court, 2013-

Abdoulaye Ly Kadidiatou Diori was appointed head of the Constitutional Court of Niger in 2013, which serves as the highest court in Niger. She is the second female President of the Constitutional Court following Fatimata Bazeye.

Diori was born in 1952 in Niamey, Niger. She was originally educated in midwifery before she decided to study at the University of Niamey and receive a baccalaureate through night school. She then received a doctorate in public law from the University of Paris-Sud in 2005. In 2013, President Mahamadou Issoufou appointed Diori for another term as head of the Constitutional Court. Also in 2013, her peers on the Constitutional Court elected Diori President of the Constitutional Court, a position that she currently serves in.



Anastasia Msosa (Malawi)

Chief Justice, 2013-2015

Justice Anastasia Msosa was born in a rural village in 1950 in Malawi. She went to Bunda College of Agriculture and from there applied to law school at Chancellor College after completing the admission requirement of two years of work experience at Chancellor. She earned a Bachelor of Law in 1975.

From there, Msosa worked on behalf of the state in both civil and criminal cases as a government lawyer. Msosa served as a legal advocate, principle legal advocate, and eventually a chief legal advocate in a span of 13 years. She then began to represent those who could not afford a lawyer in the Department of Legal Aid until 1990. She became Register General in 1990 and then became a judge in 1992.

After 1992, she was the first appointed female judge in the High Court. In 1997, she became the first female Justice of the Supreme Court of Appeals. Additionally, Msosa served as the chairperson of the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) from 1993 to 1997. During that time period, Malawi became a multiparty democracy. She was re-appointed to the MEC in 2005 and served another 2 terms until 2012. Following her MEC appointment, in a historical moment, Msosa became the first woman Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Malawi and served in the position from 2013 until 2015.

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



Nthomeng Majara (Lesotho)

Chief Justice, 2014-2019

Nthomeng Majara is the first woman to become the Chief Justice of Lesotho. She was born in Lesotho on June 8, 1963. She was educated at the National University of Lesotho, from which she obtained a bachelor's degree in law in 1992. She also holds a master's degree in law (LL.M) from King's College London, where she graduated in 1997.

Following her graduation, she became a lecturer at the National University of Lesotho from 1995 to 2000. Following her leave from the National University of Lesotho, she worked as a research associate at the Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Educational Trust until 2003. Her next role was to be the Head of Internal Affairs at the Lesotho Revenue Authority. She only held the title for 4 months in 2004 until she became a Judge of the High Court at the Court of Appeals in Lesotho in 2004.

She was appointed Chief Justice for the Court of Appeals in 2014 and held the position until 2019. In addition to these positions, she chaired the Commission of Enquiry on the Adoption of Children in Lesotho and became a member of the council of state. She also briefly acted as a judge for the High Court of Namibia in 2010.



Maria de Fátima Coronel (Cape Verde)

President of the Supreme Court of Justice, 2015-

Maria de Fátima Coronel is a judge who currently serves as the President of the Supreme Court of Justice in Cape Verde, and has served in this capacity since 2015. She was nominated by a group of judge-advisors—her fellow peers on the Supreme Court—to the President of Cape Verde who then nominated her. In this role as President, Fátima Coronel is the first woman to be elected to lead the highest court within Cape Verde. In Cape Verde, the Supreme Court of Justice is responsible for judicial, administrative, fiscal, and military decisions.

Prior to being appointed President of the Supreme Court of Justice, Fátima Coronel served as a prosecutor on behalf of the Republic of Cape Verde and worked in the criminal courts located in Praia and Santa Catarina de Santiago. She worked on the Supreme Court of Justice as an associate justice from 2000 until her appointment as President.



Manassa Danioko (Mali)

President, Constitutional Court, 2015-2020

Manassa Danioko was born on January 19, 1945 in Mali. She attended Fougères High School and received her bachelor's degree in 1966. Danioko then obtained her master's degree in law in 1970 after enrolling in the National School of Administration. She then did internships in the courts of France including the Court of Appeals, the Tribunal de Grande Instance, and the Paris Children's Court.

She became the investigating judge in the Court of First Instance of Segou from 1970 to 1971. At the Court of First Instance, Danioko became the Deputy Prosecutor for Segou, Kayes, and Sikasso between the years of 1972 and 1978. Following those roles, Danioko became the advocate general for the Court of Appeals of Bamako from 1979 until 1981. Additionally, she served two terms as the Superior Council for the judiciary from 1979 until 1988. Danioko then served as an advisor to the Special Court of State Security from 1983 to 1988. In 1985, she was also operating as the President of the Court of First Instance of Bamako. Danioko was suspended from the courts due to an interim order created in 1988. She was able to return to the court system of Mali in 1991 after the Supreme Court annulled the suspension.

Danioko was the Attorney General at the Court of Appeal in Bamako from 1991 to 1995 until she leveraged the position to become the Attorney General at the Supreme Court of Mali in 1995. That same year, Danioko became the ambassador of Mali to Canada, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela and served concurrently until 2002. Due to her many accomplishments, Danioko received the honor of becoming a Knight of the National Order of Mali. She became the National Director of the Administration of Justice from 2004 until 2005.

In 2005 until 2008, Danioko was promoted to the Constitutional Court as a judge. Her position was renewed in 2008 until 2015. In 2015, Danioko was elected the President of the Constitutional Court in Mali. She has served in this position since then. However, on July 11th, 2020 the President of Mali dissolved the Constitutional Court of Mali.

Read more: <https://www.africanwomeninlaw.com/african-women-in-law/Diakite-Manassa-Dianoko>



Irene Chirwa Mambilima (Zambia)

Chief Justice, 2015-2021

Irene Chirwa Mambilima was Zambia's first woman Chief Justice who was appointed on February 26, 2015. Justice Mambilima was educated at the University of Zambia, where she obtained a Bachelor of Laws degree. Following her baccalaureate education, she attended the University of London to receive her Master of Laws degree. Justice Mambilima was then admitted to the bar in 1977.

Directly following her admittance to the bar, she served in the Attorney General's office as a State Advocate and a Senior State Advocate from 1977 to 1984. She was simultaneously the Director of the Legal Aid Department in the Ministry of Legal Affairs, which has been renamed the Ministry of Justice. For her career beginnings, she joined the judiciary in Zambia in 1985 and served as a Commissioner for the High Court. In 1989, Justice Mambilima became the Judge of the High Court until 2002. Additionally, Justice Mambilima was appointed as the Judge-in-Charge for the Lusaka High Court in 1996 and subsequently, Judge-in-Charge of the High Court Commercial List in 2000. From 1994 until 1996, she was concurrently a member of the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ).

It was in 2000 that she was appointed to be a Judge of the Supreme Court though she was not ratified and confirmed until 2002. In 2003, Justice Mambilima became a Sessional Judge for the Supreme Court of The Gambia for one year. Between 2005 and 2015, Justice Mambilima became the Chairperson for the ECZ twice and presided over the 2006, 2011, and 2015 elections respectively. Justice Mambilima served as the Deputy Chief Justice for the Republic of Zambia from 2008 to 2015. Following her time as Deputy Chief Justice, she was elected to the position of Chief Justice for the Supreme Court in the Republic of Zambia in 2015 and continued to serve in this role until her untimely passing in June 2021.

In addition to her professional life, Justice Mambilima was the Chairperson for the Zambian Council of Law Reporting, a board member for the Child Fund Zambia Board, and also served on the Advisory Board for Women in Law Southern Africa.

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



Christine Nzeyimana (Burundi)

President, Constitutional Court, 2007-2013

Justice Christine Nzeyimana was appointed to become the President of the Constitutional Court of Burundi in 2007. She served in this position until 2013.

More information needed for this entry: We welcome submissions.



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