

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW MASTER'S SCHOLARS – 2024 COHORT

OVERVIEW

The Allan & Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust is kindly providing matched funding to help fund scholarships for five students on the MSc in International Human Rights Law (IHRL) – an innovative programme designed to provide advanced training in international human rights law and advocacy for experienced and promising mid-career lawyers and other human rights advocates worldwide. This initiative is co-funded with the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission.

We will provide a progress report in the summer of 2025. In the meantime, we are please to include information on the cohort of scholars who have recently begun the two-year part-time Master's course, which combines distance learning with residential summer schools in Oxford.

I. CHRISTINE OKENO



I am a Lawyer and Advocate of the High Court of Kenya, passionate about advancing gender equality, women's rights, and access to justice. My professional journey spans the public sector (the Judiciary and the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission), international development (UN Women and the International Development Law Organization), and the humanitarian sector (Lutheran World Federation).

In my current role as Team Leader ad interim at UN Women, Kenya Office, I manage a comprehensive program on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) and improving women's access to justice. In this role, I've conducted research on discriminatory laws, trained justice actors (the police, prosecutors, and judiciary) on gender-responsive justice delivery, and worked with legislators on legal reforms. Additionally, I serve as the disability inclusion focal point, leading diversity, and inclusion efforts across UN Women's programmes.

Growing up in rural Kenya, I was surrounded by cultural norms and practices that were unjust to women and girls. I was often appalled at how everything women and girls did was defined by unwritten rules, even dictating what women could and could not eat! To my young mind, this was unfair as these restrictions never applied to men and boys. It was only later during my studies and in law school that I fully understood the impact of discriminatory practices against women and girls. I was equally shocked to discover that the discrimination of women and girls transcended cultural practices and permeated our national laws. This sparked my passion for women's rights, an interest further shaped by the various internships with women's rights organizations.

I did my public interest attachment at the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA-Kenya) and interned at the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW). Both organizations gave me practical experience in offering free legal aid services to women seeking justice and creating legal awareness in poor communities to enable them to know and claim their rights. Although I began my career as an in-house counsel in a state corporation upon admission to the Bar, I quickly followed my passion and returned to the human rights field.

2. CHIKANNE EZEIGBO

I am a communications expert with experience in human rights, specializing in participatory framework development. Since 2021, I have been consulting with the African Development Bank (AfDB) as a Civil Society Engagement expert for East Africa, covering 13 countries. My focus has been ensuring that Bank-funded projects in the region are people-centered, inclusive, and cause no harm to communities.

Prior to AfDB, I worked with Global Rights (GR) in Nigeria. GR is a human rights capacity building organisation. My role focused on natural resource governance, advocating for the protection of the rights of mining host communities, and promoting corporate accountability through advocacy, training, and stakeholder dialogues. I also managed the National Business and Human Rights Roundtable, bringing together government, CSOs, and businesses to discuss and ensure respect for human rights in business practices.



3. TSEMA EDE

I am a lawyer with experience in human rights, governance, and gender. I am also a policy expert who has worked with the government, business corporations and non-governmental organisations on implementing people-centred policies to protect citizens' rights. Before going into development, I founded a law firm where I worked as a litigation lawyer doing pro bono work helping low-income individuals gain access to justice.

I have experience in working to strengthen activists at the grassroots level to document and expose human rights abuses, conducting community outreach and mobilisation. I work with government stakeholders at the parliamentary and executive levels on policy reforms and strengthening regulatory mechanisms for the protection of communities. I have managed projects that range from sexual and gender-based violence to protecting host community rights, advocating for the rights of children and women with disabilities, and the provision of sustainable energy solutions to local communities.

I am also passionate about sharing knowledge and building capacity. You will find me facilitating training sessions and workshops on diverse topics that promote development in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. I have worked at Global Rights, a human rights capacity-building organisation, and Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). There I worked on the DFID-supported (now FCDA) Innovation for Democratic Accountability Project. I also worked with the Heinrich Boell Foundation as the Programme Manager for the Gender and Democracy Programme.

I currently lead a joint fund for human rights defence in Nigeria, working with donors and civil society to protect human rights activists, defenders, and the media in Nigeria. I am an Acumen West Africa Fellow, a member of the Africa Assembly, an African School of Internet Governance (AFRISIG) Fellow, and an alumnus of the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford. I earned an LLM in Law focusing on International Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law and an LLB in Public and International Law.



4. ANTHONY ETUVOATA



I am a lawyer and legal consultant resident in Nigeria. I obtained my LL.D degree in international human rights law from the University of Pretoria, South Africa in 2019.

I am now a senior legal officer with the Delta State House of Assembly (the state legislative arm of government) in Delta State, Nigeria. I am also an adjunct senior law lecturer with Benson Idahosa University, Benin, Edo State Nigeria.

My research focus revolves around issues from international human rights law, international human rights institutions and compliance with human rights decisions.

5. BIANCA GYAMERA-BEECO

I am a lawyer by training and currently serve as a Magistrate (Judge of a District Court) in Ghana. I hold an LLB and Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with English from the University of Ghana.

Before joining the judiciary, I worked as a private legal practitioner, a Senior Tax Associate with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Ghana, and volunteered as a Legal Aid Officer for the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Ghana.

In 2022, I was selected as 1 of 30 African Human Rights Lawyers to undergo strategic human rights litigation training by the Open Society for Justice Initiative in Nairobi, Kenya.

In 2023, I was named by the International Association of Women Judges as a member of its inaugural Rising Leaders Cohort, a group of outstanding early-career women judges committed to advancing the rights of women in the Global South.

As a lawyer, I was limited to advocating for the rights of vulnerable people but as a judge, I get to decide whether and to what extent the rights of vulnerable people should be protected. I anticipate that the knowledge I acquire from the MSc IHRL will make these decisions easier to take.



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For further discussion please contact:

Tom Berry, Trusts and Foundations Officer | tom.berry@dae.ox.ac.uk