HAGUE BIDS FAREWELL TO JUDGE AKUA KUENYEHIA

13-03-2015

This year the theme for International Women's Day Celebrated around the world in the month of March was Make it Happen. Judge Akua Kuenyehia's career is a fitting example of this theme. She has successfully completed her twelve-year tenure as Judge of the permanent International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. The Ghanaian born lawyer and gender advocate was among the first eighteen judges elected by the Assembly of State Parties (ASP) to the ICC in New York between 3 and 7 February 2003. As these were the first judges, and to ensure that there was never again a bench of all new judges, their terms of office were staggered. Six judges were elected for three years and were eligible for re-election for an additional nine years. Another six were elected for six years and not eligible for re-election. And six more were elected for the standard nine years and not eligible for re-election. Judge Kuenyehia fell in the category of three years, eligible for re-election for an additional nine, hence, her twelve-year tenure on the bench.
Judge Akua Kuenyehia all smiles at her farewell reception and dinner at the residence of the Ghana Ambassador in the Hague, 10th March © Alphd images.

Judge Kuenyehia and her new colleagues were subsequently sworn in at a ceremony hosted by the government of The Netherlands in The Hague on 11 March 2003, in the presence of dignitaries and world leaders, including Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Officials of States parties were present, as were representatives of civil society organizations. Ghana's then Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo attended the ceremony. Africa Legal Aid (AFLA) was present and represented by its Executive Director.

The judges then proceeded to elect the first Presidency of the Court, and Judge Kuenyehia was elected First Vice President along with Judge Philippe Kirsch as President and Judge Elizabeth Odio Benito as Second Vice President. As one of the first judges of the ICC, Judge Kuenyehia played a pioneering role in the issuance of key decisions at various levels of the Court, including the Pre-Trial Chamber and the Appeals Chamber. She has adjudicated in cases including the Dafur Sudan situation involving President Omar Al-Bahir; DRC situations involving Thomas Lubanga Dyilo and Germain Katanga, the first two accused before the Court; and the Libya situation involving Al-Senussi.
Judge Kuenyehia came to the bench with expertise both as an academic and practitioner. She served as Dean of the Faculty of Law of the University of Ghana, Legon, where she was fondly called "The Dean." Professor Judge Kuenyehia can be credited for her contribution to the gender movement.
It was therefore fitting that H.E. Dr. Tony Aidoo Ghana's Ambassador to The Netherlands hosted a farewell reception in her honour attended by the international justice community, diplomatic spheres, and friends and family of the outgoing judge. Ambassador Aidoo paid a glowing tribute to Judge Kuenyehia, describing her as "an illustrious daughter of Ghana."

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