

A Consortium of Sierra Leonean Civil Society Organisations in Sierra Leone Endorses Justice Tonia Barnett's nomination as Commissioner for the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Freetown, Sierra Leone
10th October, 2021

We, the undersigned civil society organisations registered in Sierra Leone, wholeheartedly welcome the Sierra Leone Government's nomination of Justice Tonia Barnett as Commissioner of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. She still needs to be elected by experts drawn from the AU Assembly who are nominated by the State Parties to the African Charter on Human and People's Right. The election is scheduled for 14th October, 2021. Justice Barnett's nomination is a tribute to her decades-long commitment to public services, particularly the promotion and protection of women and children's rights and the delivery of justice to all. We are absolutely confident that she will demonstrate the required objectivity, fortitude and fairness required of her role on the Commission. Given the very important work that the Commission does in terms of promoting and protecting human rights on the continent, we believe that Justice Barnett's knowledge and unbridled commitment to human rights' protection will strengthen the Commission and contribute to human rights jurisprudence on the continent. In arriving at this position, we have fully considered the need for State parties to nominate and elect persons of high moral character and integrity in order to protect the integrity and quality of decisions of the Commission. We are satisfied that these requirements have been given substantial consideration in the decision to nominate Judge Samba. Importantly, by nominating Justice Samba, a very competent female jurist, the GoSL has taken steps to enhance the gender balance of the Court

Justice Barnett's distinguished qualifications, extensive experience as a Judge, temperament, and unbridled commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights make her a suitable candidate to serve on the Commission: In 2004, she graduated from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone with a Bachelor of Laws with Honours. In 2005, she proceeded to the Sierra Leone Law where she obtained a Barrister and Solicitor License (BL). In 2015, she was admitted to the Harvard Law School, USA and graduated a year later with a Master of Laws (LLM) in Women and Children's Rights. Justice Barnett has served as a Judge for 15 years, and is currently a Justice of the Court of Appeal in Sierra Leone.

"As a Magistrate, she was keen on ensuring that everyone who appeared before her enjoyed all the protections of the law, including access to legal representation, especially for women who faced serious offences. This was particularly important at a time when there was no national legal aid scheme. As a Judge of the superior court of judicature, I have been extremely impressed by her sense of duty, immense respect for litigants and legal practitioners, but more importantly, her commitment to justice and contribution to Sierra Leone's jurisprudence. These attributes have shone through her work", said Ibrahim Tommy ESQ, Executive Director, Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL)

In addition to being insightful, empathetic and diligent, Justice Barnett has dedicated herself to a life of public service. She is an educator par excellence, and has provided numerous pro bono training and consulting services for local human rights-based organisations. She has also presented papers at various conferences, and currently lectures human rights law at the Njala University, Sierra Leone. She also has an insatiable appetite for knowledge: she has participated in many training sessions relating to law, human rights, juvenile justice, and the administration of justice. In particular, she has received training about the implementation of the Maputo Protocol and Promoting Women's Rights in Africa; Access to Justice, organized by National Association of Women Judges in USA; Bail and Sentencing training, organised by The Judicial and Legal Training Institute of Sierra Leone; and Investigating and prosecuting possession of Drugs and related crimes, organised by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Justice Barnett has also received several awards and recognitions for her dedication to public service and administration of justice. In 2008, for example, she awarded for her "Professionalism in the Treatment of Juveniles in Contact with the Law.

We have followed Justice Barnett's work for a while and found her to be an honest, diligent and willing worker, who has never hidden her passion and commitment to human rights protection. She is a highly dedicated person, who has excellent interpersonal and communication skills, with outstanding discerning capabilities. We have enormous respect for Justice Barnett's intellectual capacity and curiosity, and her commitment to making Sierra Leone and the world a better place for all. Her attentiveness to detail and instructive analysis of the law and facts in the Judgments she has handed down have earned her respect among her peers and legal practitioners.

If elected to serve as a commissioner, she will be joining the Commission with astounding qualities: intelligence, integrity, passion and ingenuity. Just as importantly, she will join with an enthusiasm for improving the work of the Commission, as well as a resolute desire to understand new ideas and strategies for enhancing human rights protection in Africa. It is also quite exciting to think of the ways in which she will contribute her unique experience to promoting an understanding of human rights protection, especially for juveniles, women and girls.

We urge the AU Assembly to carefully consider Justice Tonia Barnett's nomination, who we believe, will have a lot to learn from and share with her colleagues at the African Commission on Human and People's Rights.

1. Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law
2. Institute of Governance Reform
3. Society for Democratic Initiatives (SDI)
4. Campaign for Human Rights and Development International
5. Caritas Justice and Peace Commission
6. Movement for the Restoration of Democracy
7. One Heart Sierra Leone
8. Movement for Resettlement and Rural Development
9. Women's Empowerment for Development
10. Community Organization for Mobilization and Empowerment – Sierra Leone
11. Foundation for Human Rights and Development

12. Community Mobilization for Human Rights and Development
13. RYDO-SL
14. PRIDE-SL
15. Women Against Violence and Exploitation in Society
16. Women's Forum for Human Rights and Democracy
17. Sierra Leone Citizens Rights Association
18. Legal Access Centre