



AWIDIA

AFRICAN WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY
AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

THE STATUS OF AFRICAN WOMEN IN FOREIGN POLICY



NOVEMBER 2025



**Thelma Nabwire
Mondoh**

Thelma is an administrative professional and emerging scholar in international relations and diplomacy. She currently serves as an Administrative Officer at an academic institution, where she supports academic operations, research, data management, student support and institutional coordination. With experience spanning academia, government, and the private sector, Thelma has developed strong skills in organisational management, policy, research, and stakeholder engagement. She holds a Master's in Diplomacy, Development and International Security and a Bachelor's in International Relations and Security Studies from Daystar University. Passionate about women's empowerment and youth mentorship, Thelma serves as a Mentor with the Global Give Back Circle and volunteers at the IRSK in the African Women in Diplomacy and International Affairs (AWIDIA), which promotes gender inclusion in international affairs. She is also a recipient of the 2016 Pearson Edexcel Award for the Highest Score in Africa for Global Citizenship.

MESSEGE FROM THE EDITOR, Thelma Nabwire Mondoh

Women are increasingly defining and re-defining diplomacy and international affairs in Kenya, across Africa and the World. Their contribution has led to the transformation of a traditional practice of 'formality', 'masculinity' and 'power' into one that showcases collaboration, empathy and integrity.

The profiles curated in this project highlight the diversity, yet almost similar, journeys of women who dared to learn, to question, to lead and to create space for others (gender notwithstanding) in the industry. Each profile is a portrayal of resilience, hard work and audacity. From lecture halls to high-level multilateral negotiations, from courtrooms to panels of wisdom, from humanitarian missions to international think tanks; these women have remained grounded in their values, beliefs, customs and selflessness.

As women's participation in various roles across the international systemic morphes and grows, these profiles should serve as a roadmap and reflection for generations to come.

This project was born from a simple observation that women's stories need to be told when they are still alive; that and my passion for storytelling. With each interaction, I could easily see how every story was deeply rooted in human experiences of tears, passion, perseverance, mentorship and the audacity to dream big and to take up these spaces. I hope this publication will inspire and encourage young women in diplomacy and international affairs, especially students and those struggling to pick a niche in the industry, to dream audaciously, embrace mentorship and to lead with courage, wisdom and authenticity (be true to yourself)



**I could easily see how every story
was deeply rooted in human
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these spaces.**



**Charlotte Chiyumba
Andove**

Charlotte Chiyumba, Andove is a professional in international relations, peacebuilding, and governance with experience across regional institutions, civil society, and academic spaces. She currently serves with the African Union Commission's Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) under the Mediation and Dialogue Division. Her work focuses on advancing inclusive dialogue, mediation, and governance processes across the continent. Previously, she served at the School of Politics, Policy and Governance (SPPG), where she supported faculty coordination, curriculum development, and leadership programs that promote accountable governance. Her advocacy is grounded in her early engagement with the Nala Feminist Collective, where she contributed to advancing gender equality and women's leadership in Africa. She is also a volunteer of the International Relations Society of Kenya (IRSK) and its initiative, African Women in International Affairs and Diplomacy (AWIDIA). Guided by a vision of an inclusive and self-determined Africa, her work looks toward a future where women and youth lead transformative peacebuilding and governance efforts across the continent.

MESSEGE FROM THE EDITOR, Charlotte Chiyumba Andove

It is a privilege to recognize that those who came before us have devoted themselves to guiding and supporting us through this journey. Though their path has not been without challenges, they have remained steadfast in making the way clearer and more accessible for others. Their dedication gives us hope and reminds us that no path is ever linear or effortless it takes courage, perseverance, and determination to move forward. Through our conversations with women diplomats, we were reminded of the resilience and grace that have shaped the evolution of women's roles in diplomacy. Their stories revealed that diplomacy goes beyond negotiation tables and policy it is about empathy, listening, and the power of relationships. Despite navigating complex spaces where their presence was sometimes questioned, they have led with vision and integrity. While progress has been gradual and often demanding, one message stood out, their presence matters, and their participation continues to reshape the tone and substance of diplomacy itself.

What stood out most during these interviews was the women's commitment to mentorship. Nearly all emphasized the importance of guiding and uplifting

younger professionals, ensuring that their paths are less burdened by the challenges they once faced. They view mentorship not as a favor, but as a responsibility an investment in continuity and legacy. This spirit of support sustains the next generation of women diplomats and bridges experience with aspiration. Their reflections also showed how diplomacy is changing, how soft power, cultural understanding, and inclusive dialogue are now central to global relations. These stories are more than testimonies; they are a call to action, urging us to redefine leadership, confront persistent barriers, and build platforms that amplify women's voices in international affairs. Together, their journeys form a powerful narrative of determination and purpose. We draw from these lessons a shared sense of duty to keep the door open wider for the next generation, and to carry forward a vision of diplomacy where women's leadership is not exceptional but expected, and where every young woman finds both the mentorship and the courage to make her mark.



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NOVEMBER 2025



AWIDIA PROFILE

Hon. Lady Justice (Rtd)
Effie Luhombo Owuor



**Trailblazing
Justice and
Diplomacy in Africa**



TRAILBLAZING JUSTICE AND DIPLOMACY IN AFRICA



My vision is to see an Africa where women are not only participants in diplomacy, peacebuilding, and law, but architects of the continent's future.

**Hon. Lady Justice (Rtd)
Effie Luhombo Owuor**

CAREER JOURNEY

With a career spanning over 47 years, Hon. Lady Justice (Rtd) Effie Luhombo Owuor has pioneered judicial reform and diplomacy in Kenya and across Africa. As the first Lady Judge of the High Court and later the Court of Appeal of Kenya, she broke multiple glass ceilings in the legal fraternity. Her journey included leadership roles within the judiciary, government commissions, international legal reform projects, and the African Union. She is currently the Chairperson of the African Union

Panel of the Wise, where she provides leadership in mediation, pre-electoral missions, and peacebuilding efforts across the continent.

PATH INTO INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

Though deeply rooted in Kenya's judiciary, Lady Justice Owuor's work naturally transitioned into international diplomacy. Her expertise in governance, peacebuilding, and legal reform laid the foundation for regional roles. She joined the African Union Panel of the Wise and FEMWISE-Africa, becoming a key player in mediation, conflict prevention, and women's leadership in peace processes.

PROUDEST DIPLOMATIC ACHIEVEMENTS

- Chairperson, AU Panel of the Wise (2024–2025)
- Spearheaded restructuring of FEMWISE-Africa and launched new national chapters
- Led AU electoral assessment missions to Lesotho, Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone
- Convened peace dialogues in South Sudan, Ethiopia, and the Great Lakes region
- Delivered high-level briefings at the UN Security Council and AU Peace and Security Council
- Championed women's mediation networks and youth inclusion in continental peace efforts

Challenges Faced as a Woman in Leadership

Lady Justice Owuor has navigated a male-dominated field with resilience and resolve. She has confronted challenges around gender bias, public scrutiny, and institutional resistance. Despite this, she emerged as a national symbol of justice and women's empowerment, advocating for gender equality and legal reforms for women and children.



MENTORSHIP AND ROLE MODELS

Over decades, she has mentored countless women across the judiciary and public sector. As founding Chair of the Kenya Women Judges Association and lead trainer across East and Southern Africa, she believes strongly in continuous learning and lifting others as you rise.

SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION

Lady Justice Owuor champions structured mentorship programs, more accessible leadership training, and paid internship opportunities for young professionals. She believes institutions must make room for fresh voices, diverse experiences, and inclusive policies.

VISION FOR WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

Lady Justice Owuor's vision is clear — an Africa where women are not only participants in diplomacy, peacebuilding, and law, but architects of the continent's future. She advocates for greater institutional support, university partnerships, national mentorship networks, and legislative changes that remove structural barriers for women.

FINAL WORDS

Lady Justice Owuor's legacy is one of service, vision, and transformation. From courtrooms in Nairobi to mediation tables in Addis Ababa, her leadership has reshaped how we understand diplomacy — not just as negotiations between states, but as long-term investments in justice, equity, and peace.



AWIDIA PROFILE

H.E. Amb. Henriette Geiger



**Spotlighting a
Female Diplomat
Shaping Africa's
Global Story**



SPOTLIGHTING A FEMALE DIPLOMAT SHAPING AFRICA'S GLOBAL STORY



**Sometimes,
as a woman you
have to scale back
your ambition
just to meet
expectations
placed on women**

H.E. Amb. Henriette Geiger

CAREER JOURNEY

Amb. Geiger's path into diplomacy wasn't meticulously planned — it unfolded naturally. Beginning as an intern at the United Nations (UN), she soon secured her first formal role at the United Nations Office in Vienna, Austria. Her passion and performance later earned her a post at the European Union (EU) headquarters in Brussels.

During her time at the EU, she worked on three major regions, dedicating five years each to the Horn of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America

and the Caribbean. Each assignment expanded her global lens and honed her skills in development and geopolitical strategy.

PATH INTO FOREIGN SERVICE

Unlike many traditional diplomats, Amb. Geiger never joined a national foreign ministry. Instead, her route into international service came through the UN and the EU. She rose through the ranks within these institutional structures — a different track from those involved in direct, bilateral diplomacy.

Her career took a significant turn when the European External Action Service (EEAS) was established. She now serves within this body — the European Union's official diplomatic service — engaging in high-level multilateral relations and strategy.

PROUDEST DIPLOMATIC ACHIEVEMENTS

Amb. Geiger's achievements reflect not only leadership and policy depth but also a commitment to fostering cooperation and lasting partnerships. Her fingerprints are on several major diplomatic milestones:

- Led negotiations for the EU-Kenya Free Trade Agreement (2024)
- Spearheaded the EU's Piracy Response in the Horn of Africa (EU Atalanta)
- Prepared the EU's response to the separation of Sudan and South Sudan
- Championed re-admission clauses with China to facilitate enhanced tourist mobility

CHALLENGES AS A WOMAN IN DIPLOMACY

Her diplomatic ascent came with considerable personal and institutional challenges.



“Sometimes, as a woman you have to scale back your ambition just to meet expectations placed on women.”

She shares how women often have to work twice as hard, projecting perfection at all times — from their reports to their tone of voice and even their clothing.

MENTORS AND ROLE MODELS

Over the years, Amb. Geiger’s journey has been shaped by both male and female mentors. These relationships weren’t assigned — they formed organically through mutual respect and a shared commitment to learning. She is now a mentor herself — supporting young professionals across the globe who are charting their own paths in diplomacy.

ADVICE TO ASPIRING FEMALE DIPLOMATS AND SUPPORTING YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

“Go for the stars. Don’t let anyone tell you what you can or can’t do.”

She encourages young people to:

- **Look for the next open door — even if it’s not the most glamorous.**

- **Be excellent in every assignment.**
- **Avoid choosing only the well-trodden paths.**
- **Gain standout skills and keep sharpening them.**
- **Never underestimate the value of internships — they open doors you didn’t know existed.**
- **Keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities**

She advocates for:

- **More paid internships and fellowships.**
- **Work-study programs that give young people both experience and financial support**

VISION FOR THE FUTURE IN DIPLOMACY

Her vision includes:

- **Giving talks at universities**
- **Launching structured mentorship programs**
- **Creating awareness of diplomacy as a career path**
- **Reaching back and lifting up the women coming after her**

FINAL WORDS

Amb. Geiger’s story is a reminder that diplomacy is not always about titles — it’s about courage, competence, and quiet influence. From an intern to a strategist, she is not just shaping policy — she is opening space for the next generation.



AWIDIA PROFILE

Amb. Lucy Njeri Kiruthu



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**From the
Classroom to the
Corridors of Global
Diplomacy**



FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE CORRIDORS OF GLOBAL DIPLOMACY



**As a woman,
I had to work
extra hard
compared to
male colleagues
just to be visible
or to influence.**

Amb. Lucy Njeri Kiruthu

CAREER JOURNEY

Amb. Kiruthu's diplomatic journey began far from the grand halls of the United Nations. She started her professional life as a high school teacher committed to her students but restless for something more.

"I had the conviction that one day, I would work in the foreign service of Kenya," she recalls.

Three years into teaching, she took a bold step: a study leave to pursue a Master's degree in

International Relations abroad. On her return, she quickly realised that joining Kenya's foreign service was no easy feat. Determined not to let her newly acquired expertise fade, she joined the university as an adjunct lecturer, sharing her knowledge with students while seeking a way into diplomacy.

The clearest path was through public service. Amb. Kiruthu entered the Ministry of Education, later transferring to the Directorate of Personnel Management. Eventually, a cross-transfer to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs marked the most fulfilling stage of her early career.

Proudest Achievements in Foreign Service

Two milestones stand out for Amb. Kiruthu. These moments, she says, represent the pinnacle of her commitment to representing Kenya on the global stage:

- Serving Kenya as Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva.
- Leading a team in reviewing Kenya's Foreign Policy in 2024.

CHALLENGES AS A WOMAN IN DIPLOMACY

Amb. Kiruthu's journey has not been without hurdles. "As a woman, I've had to work extra hard compared to male colleagues just to be visible or to influence," she says.

Women, she notes, are often judged more harshly and held to different standards. Relocations, frequent travel, and long hours also make it difficult to maintain an ideal work-life balance.



NAVIGATING HIGH-PRESSURE SPACES

Amb. Kiruthu's strategy has been clear:

- **Master the subject matter through constant reading and preparation.**
- **Speak with confidence and diplomacy in high-level meetings.**
- **Build supportive teams and networks.**
- **Prioritise quality time with family and friends when possible.**

"Over time, I've become more assertive and confident, ensuring that my voice is heard."

MENTORS WHO SHAPED HER PATH

Amb. Kiruthu credits senior diplomats in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for guiding her. Foremost among them is Ambassador Tom Amolo, her first immediate supervisor, whose counsel and mentorship proved invaluable. Other senior colleagues and peers also played critical roles in helping her navigate the complexities of diplomacy.

ADVICE TO YOUNG ASPIRING DIPLOMATS

- **Have a passion for the job and be willing to make personal sacrifices.**
- **Continuously improve yourself through learning.**
- **Always 'show up' when needed, ready and prepared.**

SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION

Amb. Kiruthu believes in capacity-building through mentorship — training young professionals, exposing them to real-life diplomatic situations, and guiding them in the critical skills of diplomacy, from participating in meetings to writing policy briefs.

Vision for Women in Diplomacy

Amb. Kiruthu envisions a Kenya and Africa where women's roles in diplomacy define the success of foreign policy engagements.

She advocates for equal representation in ambassadorial and leadership appointments, confident that "women are more engaging, and given the opportunity, they become the best global negotiators."



AWIDIA PROFILE

Amb. Hon. Petronila Were



From Parliament
to Pan-African
Diplomacy



FROM PARLIAMENT TO PAN-AFRICAN DIPLOMACY



The AU had never experienced such a campaign. We set the pace for future contests and redefined expectations.

Amb. Hon. Petronila Were

CAREER JOURNEY

When Amb. Hon. Petronila Were stepped into the world of diplomacy, she was not chasing novelty — she was following a thread of continuity. Having served in Kenya's Parliament and Senate, she had long observed how foreign policy quietly shaped national development.

"Foreign policy always seemed to creep into our

national discourse," she recalls. "It affects everything from politics to the economy." When the opportunity arose to serve as Kenya's Deputy Permanent Representative to the African Union and UNECA, the move felt like a natural progression. She embraced the role with urgency and focus.

PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS IN DIPLOMACY

One of her proudest achievements was steering Kenya's high-energy campaign for a national candidate to chair the African Union Commission.

"The AU had never experienced such a campaign," she says. "We set the pace for future contests and redefined expectations."

While still at Parliament, Amb. Were championed legislation on climate change action, especially the integration of climate change education into the school curriculum, a feat that earned her an award from the Mzalendo Trust. This is among other legislative proposals that have a direct impact on the people. She endeavours to drive the same impactful agenda in diplomacy.

Her portfolio extends beyond political campaigns; she has negotiated cross-border power purchase agreements, advanced infrastructure cooperation with Ethiopia and Tanzania, and facilitated projects that bridge communities and economies alike. In every sphere, her work has left tangible footprints.

CHALLENGES FACED AS A WOMAN IN DIPLOMACY

Amb. Were's path has had its obstacles.



“Women in diplomacy seem to walk on eggshells,” she admits. “We have to work twice as hard to earn half the recognition.”

She has learnt to silence the noise without silencing herself:

“I focus on the work, ignore the distractions, and remain true to my femininity. Women have inherent power; we are natural multipliers.”

ADVICE TO YOUNG WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

Amb. Were’s advice to young women is to keep learning. Take every opportunity to grow. Value mentorship — and be intentional about passing it on.

She draws inspiration from women who have paved the way, like Monica Juma, Sally Kosgey, and Amina Mohammed.

“We should not only learn from them but also tell their stories.”

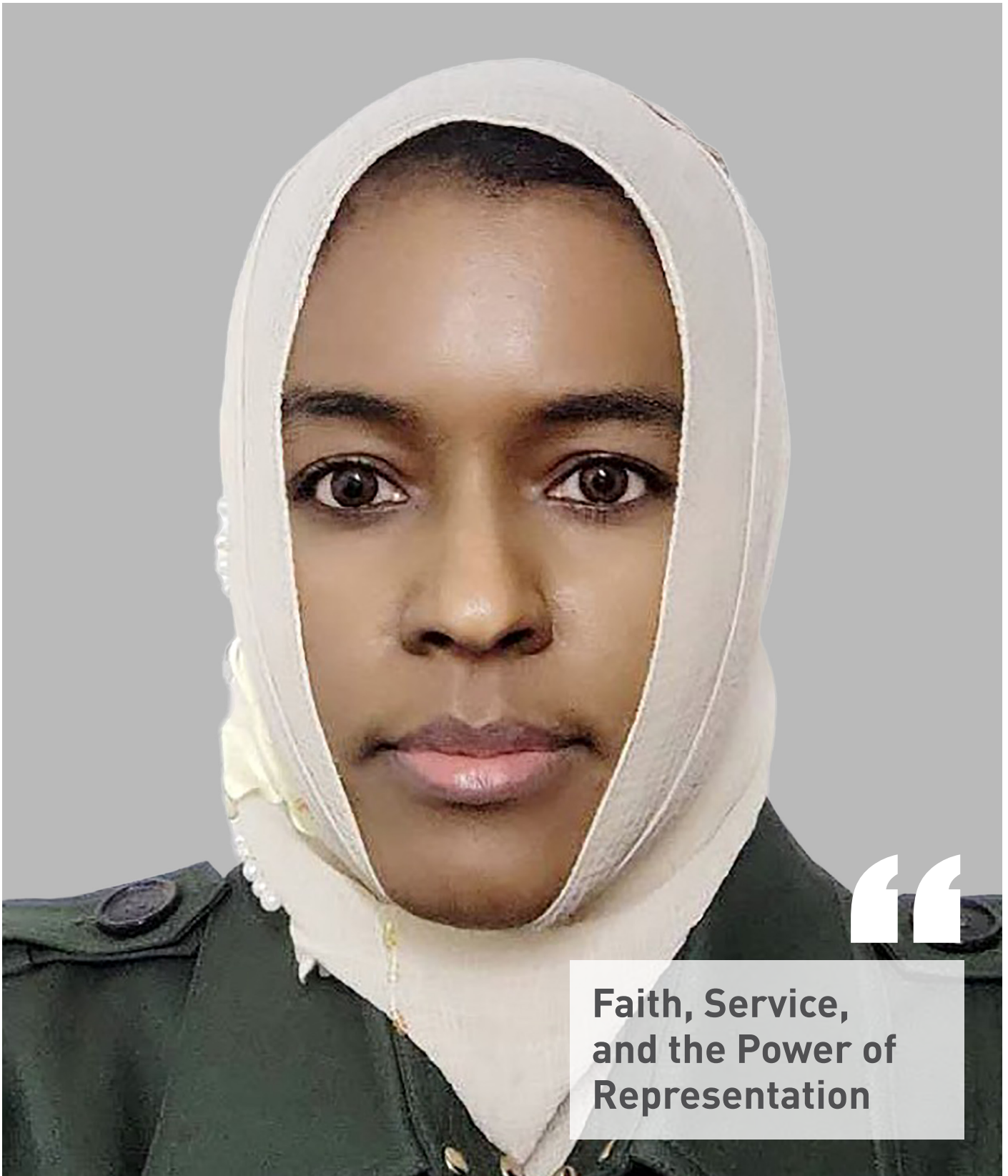
VISION FOR WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

Amb. Were envisions a future where women in diplomacy are not the exception but the norm, where young professionals are supported, protected, and encouraged to lead. She is committed to making that future a reality, whether as a mentor, a speaker, or a champion for the next generation.



AWIDIA PROFILE

Dr. Fatma Abdullatif Abdallah



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**Faith, Service,
and the Power of
Representation**



FAITH, SERVICE, AND THE POWER OF REPRESENTATION



Inspiring a future where Kenyan and African women are the architects of diplomacy, shaping policies and narratives at national, regional, and global levels.

Dr. Fatma Abdullatif Abdallah

CAREER JOURNEY

For Dr. Fatma Abdullatif Abdallah, diplomacy is more than a profession. It is a calling rooted in faith, service, and the conviction that global engagement can make a tangible difference in people's lives. Her passion for public service, combined with a love for world affairs and fluency in multiple languages, set the foundation for a distinguished 18-year career representing Kenya on the international stage. Her entry into diplomacy was serendipitous yet deeply purposeful.

In December 2006, she came across a newspaper advertisement by the Public Service Commission for positions in Kenya's foreign service. Driven by determination and a desire to serve, she applied, and in 2007, she officially joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a Third Secretary Cadet. From that moment, her journey began.

Over nearly two decades, Dr. Abdallah has risen steadily through the ranks to her current position as Minister Counsellor at the Embassy and Permanent Mission of Kenya to the United Nations in Vienna. Along the way, she has served in diverse departments, including the Middle East, Europe and the Commonwealth, Africa and the African Union, and the Foreign Service Academy. Her postings have taken her from Canberra, Australia, to Vienna, Austria, allowing her to blend Kenya's national interests with global priorities.

PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS IN DIPLOMACY

Among Dr. Abdallah's proudest achievements is serving as Head and Acting Director of Research and Foreign Policy Analysis in Kenya's Foreign Service Academy, where she helped steer its transition into a state corporation. During her tenure, she coordinated landmark initiatives, including the first-ever Women in Diplomacy Conference held in February 2024 — a milestone in Kenya's diplomatic landscape. Earning her PhD in International Relations (International Politics) stands as another crowning accomplishment, reflecting her lifelong commitment to learning and excellence.

Challenges Faced as a Woman in Diplomacy

Dr. Abdallah's journey has not been without its



challenges. As a Muslim female diplomat, she has had to navigate the complex intersection of faith, protocol, and perception. Balancing religious observance with diplomatic expectations can be delicate. For instance, attending receptions where alcohol is served or norms differ from Islamic practice can lead to misunderstanding or bias — moments where professionalism and faith must find harmony. Beyond that, she has also encountered Islamophobia and stereotypes that required her to continually assert her identity and credibility. Like many women in demanding careers, work-life balance has been an ongoing negotiation.

Through it all, Dr Abdallah credits hard work, determination, and continuous learning as her anchors. She believes in self-empowerment through education and skill-building and in embracing challenges as opportunities for growth. Her resilience is not just professional. It is deeply personal, grounded in values that guide her through every diplomatic hall and negotiation table.

ADVICE TO YOUNG WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

Dr. Abdallah's advice to young women entering diplomacy is simple yet profound:

“Do what you love, love what you do, and own what you do.”

She reminds aspiring diplomats that the profession, though demanding, is one of the most enriching and rewarding careers one can pursue; one that requires discipline, commitment, and patriotism.

Mentorship

Dr. Abdallah is a passionate advocate for mentorship and capacity building, particularly for young women entering the foreign service. She envisions structured mentorship at the foundational stage to prepare future diplomats for the realities of the profession and expose them to its many career pathways.

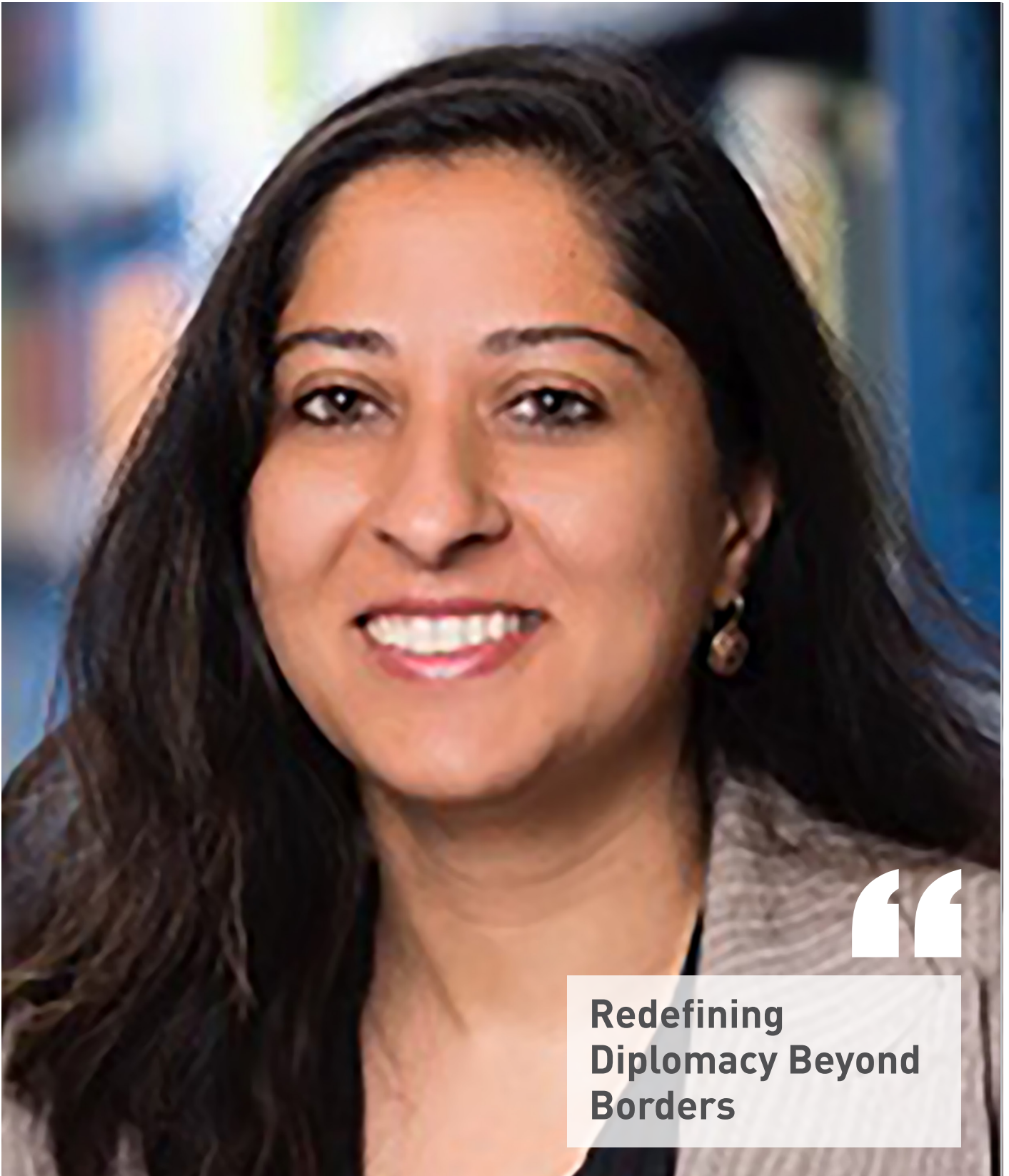
VISION FOR WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

Dr. Abdallah's vision for the future is bold and inspiring; a future where Kenyan and African women are the architects of diplomacy, shaping policies and narratives at national, regional, and global levels. African diplomacy, she says, must be defined by inclusivity, gender balance, and innovative leadership that values women's voices and perspectives. For her, the goal is clear: not just to represent Kenya, but to help redefine what representation itself looks like — one grounded in integrity, inclusion, and the courage to lead with purpose.



AWIDIA PROFILE

Professor Attiya Waris



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**Redefining
Diplomacy Beyond
Borders**



REDEFINING DIPLOMACY BEYOND BORDERS



**Learn the
landscape,
identify your
skills, and
don't limit your
ambitions to
your country of
origin**

Professor Attiya Waris

CAREER JOURNEY

Professor Attiya Waris never set out to be a diplomat in the traditional sense. She did not climb the ranks of a foreign ministry or chase prestigious postings. Her work has been shaped by a different calling — one grounded in justice, accountability, and the belief that systems should serve people, not power. A lawyer, academic, and UN independent expert, Prof. Waris has spent much of her career tracing how money flows through states and what those

flows reveal about fairness, governance, and human rights.

Her entry into international affairs was born from both frustration and purpose.

“I wanted to make change,” she reflects. “Not just in theory, but at the domestic level, in individual countries, and within the international system itself.”

Her career has taken her from lecture halls at the University of Nairobi to policy rooms in Geneva, and her work now influences global debates on financing and governance. Often, her research reached spaces she had never physically entered, cited in forums, shaping conversations, and informing decision-making around the world. The recognition was never the goal, but it affirmed what she had always known: when you work with integrity, your influence travels.

CHALLENGES FACED AS A WOMAN IN DIPLOMACY

The journey has not been without challenge. As a young African woman in both academic and international arenas, Prof. Waris has had to push past doubt, dismissal, and the subtle exclusions that persist in these spaces.

ADVICE TO YOUNG WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

Prof. Waris' advice to young women is both practical and radical: don't wait for opportunities to be handed to you.

“Learn the landscape, identify your skills, and don't limit your ambitions to your country of origin.



Diplomacy is not only about government titles — you can represent your country, your ideas, and your values in many ways.”

MENTORSHIP

For Prof. Waris, supporting young professionals means building better communication systems, making networks transparent, and ensuring clear, accessible information.

SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION

Prof. Waris is ready to give back — through mentorship, speaking engagements, and simply being visible as someone who has charted her own course in global engagement.

“People can’t step into spaces they don’t know exist.”



AWIDIA PROFILE

Ms. Cecilia Kituri



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**Carrying Forward
a Legacy in
Humanitarian
Diplomacy**



CARRYING FORWARD A LEGACY IN HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY



It began as an academic journey that gradually opened doors to influencing decisions in international affairs.

Ms. Cecilia Kituri

CAREER JOURNEY

For Ms. Cecilia Kituri, diplomacy was more than just an academic pursuit — it was a legacy. Having grown up in Geneva with parents who both worked in international organisations, she was immersed early in the language of diplomacy and global affairs. A school visit to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) left a lasting impression — little did she know she would one day return to those very halls, not as a visitor but as a professional shaping

humanitarian action. Her journey formally began in 2006, when she won Best Preliminary Speaker at the All-African International Moot Court Competition.

That victory earned her an internship at the ICRC, which later offered her a formal position in 2008. Since then, her 20-year career has taken her across Kenya, Tanzania, Djibouti, and Zimbabwe; Azerbaijan; Comoros; Mauritius and Seychelles; Malawi; Namibia; Mozambique and Zambia, allowing her to engage with governments, communities, and humanitarian actors at the highest levels.

“It began as an academic journey that gradually opened doors to influencing decisions in international affairs,” she reflects.

PROUDEST DIPLOMATIC ACHIEVEMENTS

Two experiences stand out most vividly in Ms. Kituri’s humanitarian career:

- **Burundi Crisis Response (2013):** She played a role in supporting refugees fleeing conflict, ensuring their needs were met with dignity and compassion.
- **Kenya Drought Response (2021–2022):** She helped design and implement solutions that allowed communities to cope with severe drought, safeguarding livelihoods during one of the country’s toughest seasons.

CHALLENGES AS A WOMAN IN DIPLOMACY

Working in conflict zones and volatile contexts has tested her resolve. Family postings are often impossible, forcing women to make difficult choices



between career growth and personal priorities. “You ask yourself, ‘Do I risk my career by not going to these contexts, or do I prioritise my family and safety?’”

The ICRC invests heavily in staff security, but the emotional and mental strain remains. For women especially, these choices inevitably affect the pace of career growth. Despite the challenges, Ms. Kituri celebrates the shifts happening in humanitarian and diplomatic leadership. The ICRC, after 150 years, appointed its first female president. The IFRC, too, is now led by a woman.

“It took more than a century for these changes to happen, but we’re seeing progress. Maybe one day even the UN will have a female Secretary-General, not just deputies.”

For her, these milestones show that doors are no longer locked — they’re waiting for women to walk through.

MENTORS AND ROLE MODELS

Ms. Kituri’s career has been guided by strong female role models: Amb. Amina Mohamed, whom she admired as a young girl in Geneva, watching her represent Kenya with confidence and grace.

Dr. Asha Mohamed, currently Head of the AU Office of the IFRC in Addis Ababa, who has inspired her journey by showing what is possible for women leading in global humanitarian spaces.

“Seeing her journey has been deeply inspiring. I’ve had the privilege of learning from her, and she has shown me what is possible for women in this field.”

ADVICE TO ASPIRING FEMALE DIPLOMATS

Her advice to young women:

- **Don’t be afraid to be in these spaces.**
- **Stay informed — know geopolitics, know your audience, keep up with current affairs.**
- **First impressions matter — dress the part and present yourself with confidence.**
- **Take up internships, attend forums and career fairs, and make an impression.**

SUPPORTING YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Ms. Kituri believes we are living in a unique window of opportunity for women in diplomacy and humanitarian leadership.

“The spaces are there; it just needs us to fill them. And I strongly believe there will be no other time in history when this push will be so strong.”

She emphasises the importance of academic qualifications for credibility, urging women to pursue the ‘right papers’ to strengthen their voices and ensure fair competition.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE IN DIPLOMACY

Looking ahead, she envisions a world where gender will no longer be a qualifier. Women will compete equally with their male colleagues — not because of special considerations, but because of merit.



AWIDIA PROFILE

Ms. Irene Atieno Ogaja



**Reframing Conflict
Through Diplomacy
and Analysis**



REFRAMING CONFLICT THROUGH DIPLOMACY AND ANALYSIS



It has been about showing up consistently in the spaces where my expertise and my heart are needed most.

Ms. Irene Atieno Ogaja

CAREER JOURNEY

For Irene Atieno Ogaja, diplomacy began with a question she couldn't shake: "Why do some regions remain locked in cycles of conflict while others find peace?" During her undergraduate studies, she was surrounded by stories of resilience but also of borders, displacement, and fractured relationships between nations. That early curiosity became her compass, leading her to study international relations, earning a master's degree, and now pursuing a PhD at USIU-Africa.

Seventeen years into her career, Irene sees diplomacy not only as the art of negotiation but as a way to give voice to the vulnerable, bridge cultures, and build systems that prevent suffering before it begins.

Ms. Ogaja began her international civil service career in 2009 with the East African Standby Force (EASF), translating theory into practice almost immediately. Over the last decade and a half, she has built expertise in conflict analysis and prevention, political affairs, and early warning across the greater Eastern Africa region. Her decision to pursue a PhD was not about stepping away from practice, but about deepening her understanding of conflict dynamics and preventive diplomacy. This unique blend of operational fieldwork and academic research has given her a people-centred, evidence-based approach to peacebuilding. Proudest Diplomatic Achievements

From leading election observation missions to briefing high-level political actors and training young peacebuilders, Irene's journey has never been about following a formal 'foreign service' track. Instead, it has been about showing up consistently in the spaces where her expertise and her heart are needed most. Among her proudest moments was conceptualising, coordinating, and leading fact-finding missions in Comoros and on the spillover effects of the Eastern DRC crisis. These missions required technical expertise, political acuity, and the ability to turn field realities into actionable assessments for policymakers. Her work directly shaped humanitarian interventions, regional security strategies, and high-level diplomatic engagements — reaffirming the value of strategic diplomacy grounded in evidence and collaboration.



CHALLENGES AS A WOMAN IN DIPLOMACY

Ms. Ogaja is candid about the hurdles:

- Being underrepresented in high-level forums meant having to assert her voice deliberately in technical discussions.
- Balancing the demand for excellence with the ‘invisible’ responsibilities often placed on women — mentoring, emotional labour, or logistics — alongside strategic duties.

Over time, she has chosen to transform these challenges into opportunities to mentor others and advocate for equitable recognition. Her formula for success has been rooted in preparation, precision, and purpose. She built credibility by bringing evidence-backed analysis, speaking with intention, and leading with empathy and clarity.

MENTORS AND ROLE MODELS

Mentorship — both giving and receiving — has been central. Ms. Ogaja sought allies who valued substance over status and in turn created room for younger women to step into spaces and shine. “Navigating these spaces isn’t just about surviving them — it’s about reshaping them.” She credits her achievements to her senior colleagues who entrusted her with high-stakes responsibilities early in her career. Their honest feedback and confidence in her abilities helped shape her growth.

Outside of work, a close friend has been her spiritual anchor, and her partner has challenged her to sharpen her habits and embrace complexity. Together, these mentors have shaped not only her career but her mindset.

ADVICE TO ASPIRING FEMALE DIPLOMATS AND SUPPORTING YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Her advice to young women:

- Build depth — in both your skills and your self-belief.
- Develop competencies in writing, negotiation, strategic thinking, and tools like open-source intelligence.
- Seek mentors who challenge, not just support.
- Don’t wait to feel ‘ready’ — rise to the occasion and grow through critique.
- Remember: ‘Your voice is not an accessory to diplomacy — it’s a strategy. Use it well, and use it often.’

She believes young people need more than entry points — they need ecosystems that foster resilience and growth. That means:

- Structured mentorship programs.
- Access to technical training in areas like OSINT, mediation, and policy writing.
- Real responsibility — drafting briefs, leading missions, coordinating teams.

“When young professionals are seen as partners, not just learners, they rise to the occasion.”

Vision for the future in Diplomacy

Her vision is of a future where women are not the exception, but the norm — leading negotiations, commanding missions, and shaping policy across Africa.

She imagines a profession where mentorship, skills, and trust are intentionally cultivated, and where women don’t have to ‘break into’ diplomacy, but inherit it as a legitimate career path.

“The future of diplomacy in Africa must be one where women lead not in spite of the system but as architects of a better one.”



AWIDIA PROFILE

Dr. Winnie Rugutt-Chebon



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Shaping Minds,
Shaping Futures in
Diplomacy



SHAPING MINDS, SHAPING FUTURES IN DIPLOMACY



**Read about
diplomats,
follow global
affairs, network,
volunteer, and
join professional
communities.
Connections
matter.**

Dr. Winnie Rugutt-Chebon

CAREER JOURNEY

Dr. Winnie Rugutt's love for diplomacy began long before she stepped into a lecture hall. Fresh out of high school, she dreamed of becoming a lawyer, but when the door to law school did not open, she chose her second option: a Bachelor's degree in International Relations at USIU. It turned out to be the perfect fit. From her very first semester, she knew she was exactly where she needed to be. Global history, Pan-Africanism, and the study of how

the world works lit a spark that still burns brightly today.

That spark led her straight into a master's program, and while pursuing her degree, she got her first taste of teaching at a small college in Nairobi. The experience changed everything. Standing before a classroom didn't just deepen her understanding of diplomacy — it built her confidence, sharpened her thinking, and gave her a front-row seat to how knowledge can inspire.

Today, a decade later, Dr. Rugutt is a lecturer in diplomacy and international relations at the University of Nairobi, teaching courses like Introduction to Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Politics of Aid and Development, and The Diplomatic History of Kenya. And yet, she's not done — serving as a diplomat is still on her horizon.

PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS

Her career has already been rich with milestones.

- Earning a PhD in International Studies while balancing family life was a triumph in perseverance.

- Securing a U.S. Embassy grant to mark 60 years of U.S.-Kenya partnership gave her the chance to work directly with diplomats on projects spanning trade, the creative economy, and educational exchange.

Early on, her collaboration with the National Defence College expanded her understanding of security's role in diplomacy.

CHALLENGES AS A WOMAN IN DIPLOMACY

Balancing work and family remains one of Dr. Rugutt's biggest challenges.



“You can’t give 100% to both at the same time,” she admits. Instead, she has learnt to prioritise intentionally carving out blocks of time for work and blocks for family and accepting that balance is a moving target.

Dr. Rugutt believes women bring something unique to diplomacy — the ability to bring people together, move discussions forward, and offer perspectives often missing from the table. A diplomat once told her that women bring colour to diplomacy; without them, it would just be black and blue suits. “That really resonated with me,” she says.

MENTORS WHO SHAPED HER PATH

Dr. Rugutt’s mentorship philosophy is that no one person can guide your entire journey; instead, you need a series of mentors at different stages. For her, Professor Maria Nzomo — diplomat, academic, and

former department chair — has been a constant source of inspiration.

ADVICE TO YOUNG ASPIRING DIPLOMATS

Dr. Rugutt’s advice to aspiring women diplomats is as intentional as her own career: believe you can, immerse yourself in the field, and keep learning.

“Read about diplomats, follow global affairs, network, volunteer, and join professional communities. Connections matter.”

VISION FOR WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

Dr. Rugutt envisions a future where women in diplomacy aren’t just participants; they’re leaders shaping policy, setting agendas, and influencing global change. She is committed to making sure the next generation is ready for that future.



AWIDIA PROFILE

Ms. Nimo Mohamoud Jirdeh



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**Bridging
Cultures, Building
Cooperation**



BRIDGING CULTURES, BUILDING COOPERATION



**Looking ahead,
my vision for
women in diplomacy
in Kenya and
across Africa
is one of equal
representation and
transformative
influence.**

Ms. Nimo Mohamoud Jirdeh

Career Journey

For Nimo Mohamoud Jirdeh, diplomacy is more than a profession. It is a calling rooted in empathy, understanding, and service. Her journey into international affairs began with a deep curiosity about how nations connect and collaborate to solve shared challenges. Growing up in a world shaped by diverse cultures, she became passionate about fostering understanding across borders and contributing to peace and development through cooperation.

Ms. Jirdeh's academic path in international relations and diplomacy as a PhD candidate laid the foundation, but it was her hands-on 15 years of experience that truly defined her trajectory. From shaping policy and leading multi-stakeholder dialogue, to designing transformative development programmes with the World Bank and the United Nations to working with several premier international organisations and the Swiss Embassy as a Governance and Policy Advisor for the Horn of Africa, each step gave her new insight into the delicate balance between policy, culture, development and diplomacy. Her current leadership at the helm of HOME Institute (Horn of Africa and Middle-East Institute) is expanding her footprint across the ocean in the Middle-East. Travel, exposure to different perspectives, and engagement with global institutions all reinforced her conviction that diplomacy is about people; about listening, learning, and leading with integrity.

Proudest Achievements in Diplomacy

Ms. Jirdeh's proudest professional achievement came when she facilitated a multilateral agreement on regional peace that brought together a range of stakeholders to address a complex regional issue. The process demanded patience, cultural sensitivity, and strong negotiation skills, but it also highlighted what she values most in diplomacy: cooperation built on mutual respect and trust.

Challenges Faced as a Woman in Diplomacy

Ms. Jirdeh's journey has not been without challenges. As a woman in traditionally male-dominated diplomatic spaces, she often had to work harder to establish credibility and be heard. Balancing a demanding career with personal life also tested



her resolve. Yet each obstacle became a lesson in resilience. These experiences not only strengthened her leadership but also deepened her commitment to gender equity and empowering other women entering the field.

NAVIGATING HIGH-PRESSURE SPACES

In navigating high-pressure environments, Ms. Jirdeh has relied on three principles: preparation, professionalism, and presence. She entered every space well-informed, engaged mentors and allies who valued inclusivity, and used her voice strategically to shape discussions and decisions. Over time, consistency and integrity earned her the respect of peers and superiors alike.

MENTORS WHO SHAPED HER PATH

Mentorship, she emphasises, has been vital. Senior diplomats, professors, family and colleagues offered guidance, helping her grow both professionally and personally.

“I’ve been especially inspired by women leaders who balance empathy with strength,” she reflects. “They showed me that diplomacy can be both principled and compassionate.”

It is a lesson she now pays forward by mentoring others who aspire to follow a similar path.

ADVICE TO YOUNG WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

Ms. Jirdeh’s message to young women is simple yet powerful: believe in your voice and potential, even when the room feels intimidating. She encourages them to build a strong foundation in global affairs, communication, and languages, but also to develop empathy and resilience.

“Integrity, curiosity, and compassion”, she says, “are the qualities that make diplomacy truly impactful.”

SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION

For Ms. Jirdeh, supporting young professionals in diplomacy requires more than opportunities; it requires structure. Mentorship programmes, inclusive leadership, peer networks, and work-life balance must become the norm.

“When young people are given trust and space to contribute, they don’t just learn — they lead,” she adds.

VISION FOR WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

Looking ahead, her vision for women in diplomacy in Kenya and across Africa is one of equal representation and transformative influence. She envisions a diplomatic corps where women’s voices not only inform but also define policy, driving peacebuilding, economic growth, and sustainable development.

“The future of diplomacy”, she believes, “belongs to women who lead with empathy, innovation, and strength — reshaping global engagement to reflect Africa’s diversity and potential.”

A prolific thought leader, Nimo has authored several influential publications. She has completed higher education and advanced training in public policy, development practice, and political economy at prestigious institutions including Harvard University, the Graduate Institute of Geneva, the University of Basel in Switzerland and Edith Cowan University in Australia. Nimo is currently pursuing a PhD in International Relations majoring in Foreign Policy and Diplomacy at United States International University–Africa and remains deeply committed to building bridges across borders, sectors and disciplines to promote peace, shared prosperity and resilient governance.



AWIDIA
AFRICAN WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY
AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS