

## “I Speak on Behalf of the Voiceless”

### UNODC interviews Advocate Olyvia Martha Imalwa, Prosecutor General, Namibia

In recognition of International Women’s Day on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2021, the UNODC Regional Office for Southern Africa (ROSAF) spoke with an inspirational figure in women’s leadership, Advocate Olyvia Martha Imalwa, who has served as Prosecutor General for Namibia since 2004. Prior to her appointment as Prosecutor General, Adv. Imalwa enjoyed a long and impressive career, from leading a battallion of women soldiers in the Namibian War of Independence, to later completing her Honours degree in Law at the University of Warwick (UK). Following this, she returned to Namibia in 1989 to participate in democratic elections in her home country.

Since becoming a public prosecutor in 1992, Adv. Imalwa has served as Control Prosecutor for the Northern Towns in Namibia, Regional Court Prosecutor, and worked in challenging fields of law such as human-trafficking, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and complex corruption. In 2000, she was the first black woman to be appointed Deputy Prosecutor General in Namibia. “I serve with dedication,” she says, noting that while pregnant with her twin boys, she did not take maternity leave until the day she went into labour – and returned to work 2 weeks after giving birth.

Throughout her career, Adv. Imalwa has always been passionate about cases involving vulnerable peoples such as women and children. She explains, “I realized that I needed to speak on behalf of the voiceless people in society...I once brought a case to court where my victim was a young child, less than 2 years of age, and they could not testify. So I carried the child into court in my arms and told the judge, ‘This is the victim’ – I got a conviction.”



*Adv. Olyvia Imalwa, Prosecutor General, Namibia*



*Namibian Office of the Prosecutor General*

Adv. Imalwa considers Mary, the mother of Jesus, as her personal role model for demonstrating the courage of women under pressure. To this end, she embraces the role of mentor to young women in the male-dominated field of criminal justice. Adv Imalwa states, “Of course, these societies are mostly dominated by men. But women are capable, and we must be courageous like Mary. We are not meant to be behind men - We should also be in front of them, and be their leaders.”

Under the leadership of Adv. Imalwa, the Namibian Prosecuting Authority and UNODC provide training for investigators, prosecutors, and social workers in GBV, human-trafficking, and asset recovery. This partnership culminated in the production of the successful ‘U-Turn to Hope’ film on GBV and the role of the Prosecuting Authority in seeking justice for victims. “In 2020, Namibia was the only country in Africa to be placed on Tier 1 for the elimination of human trafficking,”<sup>1</sup> Adv. Imalwa says proudly, “I believe this success is a direct result of our partnership with UNODC.”

Recently, Adv. Imalwa’s appointment as Prosecutor General was extended for an additional 5 years, at which time she has publically announced her intention to retire from the Prosecuting Authority. Throughout her remaining time as Prosecutor General, Adv. Imalwa intends to focus on educating and training the future generation of Namibian prosecutors, promote awareness of victim’s rights, strengthen the independence of the judiciary, and ensure a smooth transition to Namibia’s next Prosecutor General. Speaking to the ongoing relationship between the Namibian Prosecuting Authority and UNODC in the years ahead, Adv. Imalwa closed the interview by stating enthusiastically, “I could write a book on UNODC assisting us in Namibia. We are where we are because of them, and I want us to cement our relationship and cooperation. I know we will achieve that.”



*Adv. Olyvia Martha Imalwa*

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<sup>1</sup> “2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: 20<sup>th</sup> Edition (TIP),” *United States of America Department of State*, June 2020.