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UNITY DOW

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Jurist
Founder
Author
Legislator



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Unity Dow

Advocate | Author | Jurist | Changemaker

Justice Unity Dow (rtd) is a trailblazer whose life is a powerful blend of justice, activism and creativity. As Botswana's first female High Court Judge, she made groundbreaking rulings that changed lives and set new legal precedents. She is also a celebrated author whose writings shine a light on public health, indigenous peoples and the human condition. Through her work as a jurist, legislator and advocate, Dow has left an indelible mark on her country, the region and the world.

About

Justice Dow (rtd) is the only person in Botswana who has served in all three arms of government. Dow is a Member of Parliament in the National Assembly of the Republic of Botswana. She is a former judge of the High Court of Botswana, as well as a former Minister, first of Education and later of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Dow is a human rights lawyer and defender of international acclaim. Early in her career, she mounted a successful constitutional challenge which affirmed equal rights for women under the Botswana Constitution. The Attorney General v Unity Dow of 1992 is now internationally recognised as one of the most significant decisions on women's human rights. Over the years, Dow, as a lawyer, has mobilised grassroots communities and used the law as a tool to create and expand rights for indigenous peoples, children, women, LGBTQI+, and other marginalised and underserved groups. Later as a judge, Dow presided over the now famous CKGR Bushmen Case.

Honourary Doctorates

- Kenyon College '01
- St Michael's College '07
- University of Edinburgh '09

Founder

Alongside six other women, Dow founded Baobab Primary School in Gaborone, and later with her children, founded The Dow Academy, a PreK-12 school in Mochudi, Botswana. Dow also founded AIDS Action Trust, the first HIV/AIDS specific NGO in Botswana and served as member of the Data Safety Management Board of the Botswana-Harvard Aids Partnership, which oversaw HIV/AIDS clinical trials. During her illustrious career, Dow also co-founded more than six NGOs dedicated to the work of advancing the rights of women in her native Botswana, the region and internationally.

➤ Global Impact

Co-founded International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP). IWRAP collaborated with Metlhaetsile Women's Information Centre (Mochudi, Botswana) and jointly played a pivotal role in mobilising and equipping delegates from Southern Africa for their participation at the 4th United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995.

The 1995 Beijing Conference, as it came to be known, is credited with heralding a seismic shift from the traditional welfare approach to women's issues towards the more progressive rights-based approach.

The global mobilisation of women in preparation for the 1995 Beijing Conference played an important role in the Botswana Government's decision to amend the citizenship law in compliance with the Botswana Court of Appeal Decision in the Attorney General v Unity Dow.

➤ Southern Africa

Co-founded WLSA. Metlhaetsile Women's Information Centre and Women Against Rape (WAR). These organisation were founded to advance the understanding and assertion of their rights to participate, to be heard, to change and to mobilise as a constituency of women.

The variety of programs included education and training, litigation and advocacy to combat gender-based violence and to provide critical support and resources to survivors moving intentionally and purposefully toward systemic legal and social change to protect women and children.





Author

DRIVING CHANGE THROUGH STORYTELLING

Dow has authored both fiction and non-fiction works. Her works of fiction are titled *Far and Beyond*, *Screaming of the Innocent*, *Juggling Truths*, and *The Heavens May Fall*.

Dow's non-fictional work entitled *Saturday is for Funerals* was co-authored with Professor Max Essex and published by Harvard University Press in 2010.

BOOK TITLES – UNITY DOW THE AUTHOR

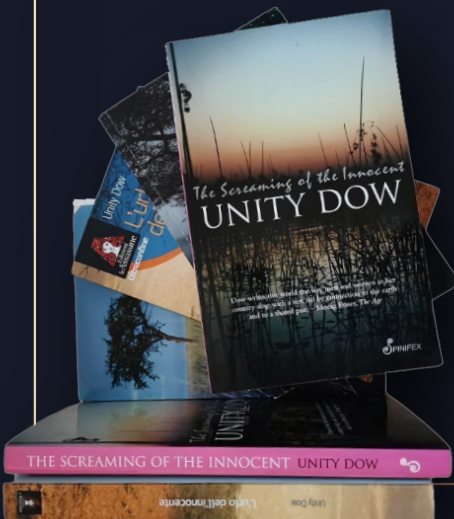
Her works of fiction have been translated into over five languages.

FICTION

- *Far and Beyond*
- *Screaming of the Innocent*
- *Juggling Truths*
- *The Heavens May Fall*

NON FICTION

- *Saturday is for Funerals*
Co-authored by Professor Max Essex



Jurist

Dow's career as a jurist is a testament to her unwavering dedication to justice and equality. Through her work as a lawyer, judge, and international legal expert, she has shaped laws, challenged discrimination, and upheld the principles of fairness on both national and global stages.

She gained prominence for taking on cases that others deemed too controversial, including those addressing gender equality and human rights.

One of her most notable cases was the landmark Attorney General v Unity Dow which challenged Botswana's discriminatory citizenship laws and secured equal rights for women to pass citizenship to their children.

Her legal career is defined by a commitment to advocating for the marginalized and ensuring that the law serves as a tool for empowerment and fairness.



A Life in Justice

1992

When the Law said: **"Her children could not be citizens of her country Botswana."**

She:

- Successfully challenged the constitutionality of the law resulting in the seminal court decision of The Attorney General v Unity Dow 1992 BLR 119.
- Paved the way to the government's total overhaul of laws affecting women, bringing them into compliance with the ruling in the Dow Case.

1993

When the Law said: **"The existing mechanisms/structures for accessing justice were sufficient for all Botswana's citizens."**

She:

- Initiated marches and protests
- Mounted workshops and seminars
- Used theatre and drama
- Wrote novels

A Life in Justice

1996

When the Law said: "A married woman who moves out of the marital home prior to getting a divorce, could not have access to any of the joint marital property."

She:

- Introduced the concept of "access and use" of joint property without the need for its division
- Successfully enlisted the police, on pain of being responsible if such a woman was assaulted by her husband, to overseeing peaceful removal of said property

When the Law said: "Despite the law providing for life sentence for rape, Magistrates could and did sentence rape convicts to 3-year jail terms."

She:

- Bused women 80km from Mochudi to Molepolole, to attend a rape trial with the result that the perpetrator received a ten-year jail term, then the highest ever handed down.
- Initiated protest marches against the low sentences in rape cases.
- Successfully participated in advocating for legislative reforms that led to the setting of ten years as the minimum sentence for rape

1997

When the Law said: "Her under-age pregnant rape victim client could not have the pregnancy terminated because of hospital superintendent was Catholic; and that the rape victim could not give evidence because she was deaf and mute."

She:

- Successfully sued the government, compelling the termination of the pregnancy
- Challenged the traditional evidence taking methods and facilitated the trial and conviction of the perpetrator

When the Law said: "The children of her 188 clients were only entitled to P40/month (US\$13) for child support."

She:

- Paralysed the court system by filing 188 court cases, clogging the system, with the result that no other case could be registered
- Shone a light on the discriminatory provisions of a law that placed unfair financial burden on women and discriminated against children born out of marriage.
- Forced Parliament to pass a new child support law that is non-discriminatory on the basis of sex of the parent or marital status of the mother

A Life in Justice

2006

When the Law said: "The Bushmen/Basarwa could not live or hunt in their ancestral land."

She:

- Held that the Bushmen had a right to their ancestral land

2010

When the law said: "The LGBTQI+ community could not organise and associate publicly."

She:

- Successfully sued the government, leading to the registration of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals of Botswana (LEGABIBO)

2011

When the Law said: "The administration of corporal punishment was just, despite injury to her client."

She:

- Successfully sued the government for financial compensation.

WORK WITH UNITY DOW



Globally Recognised Expertise

Justice Dow (rtd) has earned three honorary doctorates in Law. She was also awarded the French Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, the highest French order of merit, both military and civil.

Unity Dow offers her insights and experience to individuals, organisations, and governments looking to change narratives.

[SCHEDULE NOW](#)

Legislator

SHAPING POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

Dow's legislative career reflects her deep commitment to advancing policies that improve lives, protect rights, and foster progress. As a member of Botswana's Parliament and an active participant in international parliamentary bodies, she has been at the forefront of shaping governance for a better future.

Member of Parliament

Dow is a member of the 13th Parliament for the Kgatleng West Constituency. This is Unity Dow's third term as a member of Parliament. She is one of six women in a 67 member Parliament. Unity Dow has served as the Minister of Education, Minister of Infrastructure and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.



National Parliamentary Committees

Dow serves on the following Parliamentary Committees.

- i. Foreign Affairs, Defence, Justice and Security Committee
- ii. Governance & Oversight Committee
- iii. National Assembly Staff Committee
- iv. Parliamentary Caucus on Women Committee

Dow is the Chair and the only female member of the Foreign Affairs, Defence, Justice and Security Committee. She is also the only female member of the Governance & Oversight Committee.

International Parliamentary Bodies

Dow is a member of the following Inter-Parliamentary Bodies. Inter-Parliamentary Bodies are forums at which members of Parliament meet to communicate and collaborate around issues inter alia of peace, good governance, democracy, trade and the environment. The guiding principles of these bodies are to further the creation of a more just and inclusive world community.

- i. The African, Caribbean and Pacific States-European Union (ACP-EU) Joint Parliamentary Body
- ii. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
- iii. Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)
- iv. Climate Parliament
- v. Global Equality Caucus

Sponsor a Bill

Tap Unity Dow's legislative and legal expertise influence, draft, refine, and advocate for impactful legislation. Whether addressing small business, human rights, education, farming or public health, Unity Dow is willing and able to lend insight, contextual advise and legal advise.

Externship/Internship Program

Unity Dow is passionate about mentoring the next generation of leaders and world citizens. Working with her affords hands-on learning experiences and invaluable guidance.

- **Urban Morgan Human Rights Fellows:** A unique opportunity for aspiring human rights advocates to gain exposure to real-world challenges and strategies under Unity's mentorship.
- **Pupillage:** Law students and recent graduates can refine their skills and deepen their understanding of legal practice while working directly with Unity Dow.
- **Arbitration Fellow:** This program equips participants with the knowledge and expertise to excel in arbitration, guided by Unity's wealth of experience in the field.

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Risk. Management. Advisory