

ALUMNI PROFILE

Anebi Adoga, a 1999 graduate of American University's Washington College of Law (WCL), is a Nigerian human rights lawyer and the co-founder and current editor of the *Human Rights Monitor* (HRM). HRM, founded in 1992 in Kaduna, Nigeria, is a non-partisan, non-governmental human rights organization committed to promoting and protecting human rights in Nigeria; members include lawyers, academics, students, and journalists. The organization works to provide legal and human rights education in northern Nigeria, as well as to provide free legal aid to the local population. HRM has a particular interest in serving traditionally vulnerable groups.

Adoga's interest is in promoting, applying, and enforcing human rights in Nigeria. Growing up in Nigeria, Adoga "saw firsthand the gross violations of human rights of all people," especially the most vulnerable in society, including women and children. Adoga carried these experiences to WCL, where he studied international human rights. Adoga stated that his experiences at WCL enhanced his effectiveness as a human rights advocate and recommends WCL to students interested in pursuing human rights careers. He will begin teaching international human rights law in the near future and plans to introduce curricula from WCL classes into one of Nigeria's major law schools. While at WCL, Adoga served on the Newsletter Staff for the *Human Rights Brief* (HRB). He remains part of the HRB as an alumni board member.

Adoga is interested in international human rights law from a cross-cultural perspective and its application within Nigeria. According to Adoga, "Nigeria is a multi-cultural and multi-religious society with a history of religious and ethnic conflicts." Therefore, promoting and enforcing international human rights in this area of the world is particularly challenging, requiring activists to consider cultural and religious issues which add layers of complexity to the practice of human rights law in the region. As Adoga suggests, "a human rights advocate will not just be dealing with the laws or rights but a state of mind or a way of life."

Adoga's work addresses questions such as the following: How can instruments of the state be used to promote and enforce human rights? How should human rights advocates work to promote and enforce international human rights within diverse cultures? In Nigeria, where religious and cultural practices are often written into local law, what should be done in instances where such laws institutionalize human rights violations?

Adoga and the staff of HRM actively explore the answers to these questions in their work. Among their objectives are in defense of freedom of thought and expression, and the protection of equality and due process rights under Nigerian law.

To that end, HRM provides free legal assistance to indigent victims of domestic violence, educates local labor and student unions as well as professional bodies in Nigeria on the laws governing their trades and professions, and empowers individual Nigerian citizens to understand and to defend their fundamental rights.

In addition to working with individuals, HRM lobbies and campaigns nationally to advance human rights legislation in Nigeria. HRM strives to promote accountability and transparency in the public and private sectors of Nigerian society by engaging in programs that work to strengthen the Nigerian legal system and to guarantee a free and independent judiciary. Moreover, HRM investigates human rights abuses and reports on human rights situations, focusing on those involving women, children, local courts, police officers, and other governmental institutions.

Adoga's work with HRM has helped to carry out several initiatives including the Ethnic and Religious Rights Project, from 1997 to 1998. Through this project, HRM aimed to assist civil society groups and organizations to analyze potentially serious conflicts in the area, to identify how outside forces and actors manipulate ethnic and religious issues in Nigeria, and to develop positive strategies to help resolve conflicts. From 1998 to 1999, HRM conducted the Freedom of Association Project, holding training workshops for students, bar associations, women's groups, and other professional bodies promoting freedom of association. HRM, with the help of conference participants, also published a study on the repression of human rights under Sani Abacha's administration, in place in Nigeria from 1993–1998 and accused of many human rights violations. That year, HRM organized a training and advocacy workshop on good governance, human rights and democratic development for civil society leaders. The workshop focused on issues such as Nigerian women and the democratic process, sustaining and consolidating democracy with reference to the role of civil society, the role of the Nigerian media in a democratic society, human rights litigation in a democratic society, and the role of human rights advocates in northern Nigeria.

Moreover, Adoga and HRM organized a project on the condition of the Almajiri (in Nigeria, those who beg for assistance in the street or by going house to house, largely children) in the Northwest Zone of Nigeria. During this project, HRM aspired to trace the development of the Almajiri in states within the UNICEF zone and to identify different forms of child abuses in Almajiri circles. The project also looked to evaluate existing protective measures and institutional support for improving the situation, and to identify major obstacles to preventing child abuse in the Almajiri system. At the conclusion of the conference, a research paper entitled, "The

condition of Almajiri in the Northwest Zone of Nigeria” was produced. HRM distributed the report to local and international governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Adoga remains executive director of HRM as it continues to focus attention on the problems of constitutional democracy in Nigeria. He continues to promote human rights on an individual level. For example, to improve understanding of issues faced by women and children living under Islamic law, Adoga worked and studied the activities of human rights organizations in Pakistan. There he learned about popular education and legal assistance programs in court systems which rely heavily on Islamic law.

Adoga has appeared in immigration courts as a human rights expert for asylum applicants of diverse backgrounds. He has also worked with WCL’s International Human Rights Law clinic, where he aided an applicant from Nigeria. He

has interviewed victims of human rights abuses in countries such as Pakistan, Nigeria, and the United States. In addition to his *Juris Doctorate from WCL*, Adoga is a Barrister of the Supreme Court of Nigeria, representing victims of human rights abuses. United States, Canadian, and European immigration officials have all sought Adoga’s views and opinions on human rights issues related to Nigeria.

Adoga has dedicated his career to promoting human rights. He has stated that in Nigeria, human rights advocates are sometimes considered foreign agents or a corrupting influence. Where religious and cultural beliefs are sensitive, Adoga finds that the work of a human rights advocate can be extremely dangerous. Despite these challenges Adoga continues aiding vulnerable individuals worldwide. **HRB**

Lynn Burke, a J.D. Candidate at the Washington College of Law, covers the Alumni Profile for the Human Rights Brief.