

UN judge with human rights training convicted of modern slavery

- March 16, 2025



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In a sensational case, 49-year-old Ugandan judge Lydia Mugambe was found guilty of modern slavery in the UK. The conviction casts a shocking light on the discrepancy between her professional position as a UN judge and human rights expert and her personal behavior. Is this the much-vaunted "cultural enrichment"?

Mugambe, who studied human rights at Columbia University and even received the prestigious Vera Chirwa Human Rights Prize, lured a compatriot to the UK under false promises, according to the court ruling. There, she forced the woman to work as a housekeeper without pay and to care for her children while she herself worked on her doctorate at Oxford University.

"Lydia Mugambe exploited and abused [the victim] by taking advantage of his lack of understanding of his rights to properly paid employment and deceiving him about the purpose of his entry into the UK," prosecutor Caroline Haughey [told](#) the jury.

The charges included several serious offenses: conspiracy to facilitate a breach of UK immigration law, facilitation of entry for the purpose of exploitation, forced labor, and conspiracy to intimidate a witness, all of which fall under the UK's Modern Slavery Act.

Mugambe's reaction to her arrest, which was [captured on police](#) cameras, was particularly revealing. When she was told that she was "suspected of holding someone in slavery and servitude", she replied indignantly: "I am a judge in my country. I even enjoy immunity. I am not a criminal." However, this invocation of diplomatic immunity proved to be unfounded. The police commander for Oxfordshire, Ben Clark, made it clear: "Any immunity Mugambe may have enjoyed as a UN judge has been waived by the UN Secretary General's office."

The prosecutor described the case as particularly reprehensible: "A young woman brought here for the convenience of Ms. Mugambe's life but mistreated - mistreated by Ms. Mugambe, a woman of power and intelligence who had no qualms about lying not only to [the victim] but also to the police as they tried to ensure her safety and well-being." The verdict elicited audible reactions in the courtroom. The courtroom had to be cleared when Mugambe showed signs of ["health problems"](#). Sentencing is scheduled for May 2.

The condemnation is in stark contrast to Mugambe's public image. In 2019, she received the Vera Chirwa Human Rights Award, which is given to "an individual who has distinguished themselves through dedicated human rights activism... has contributed to a particular human rights cause" and has worked to "improve the lives of people in Africa".

The Ugandan newspaper ["Monitor"](#) reported at the time: "She was recognized by the highly respected University of Pretoria in South Africa for her contribution to advancing the socio-economic rights of the vulnerable and ensuring gender-equitable justice in Africa through her courageous and impactful judicial career."

Now a British court has found that instead of defending a vulnerable woman, Mugambe exploited her instead. The case raises fundamental questions about the integrity of people in positions of power. Or is this simply another case of "cultural enrichment"?