



# AMLF SENDS

African Military Law Forum Newsletter, Issue 4

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## President's Welcome

Welcome to the fourth edition of *AMLF SENDS*. It is my honor to introduce a most distinguished colleague, and the first Co-Chair of AMLF, Colonel Marguerite MEFFAND-LOAW Epse ADELO ABANDA, Deputy Director of Military Justice, Cameroon Armed Forces.

## Interview with Colonel Marguerite MEFFAND-LOAW Epse ADELO ABANDA

In this issue, Ms. Sandra Franzblau, USAFRICOM Office of Legal Counsel, conducts an interview with Colonel Marguerite MEFFAND-LOAW Epse ADELO ABANDA, Deputy Military Justice, Cameroon Armed Forces, and a first Co-Chair of AMLF.

1. Hello Colonel Marguerite MEFFAND-LOAW Epse ADELO ABANDA. Could you describe your current position within the Cameroon Defense Forces? How many years have you been in the military?

**Hello Sandra FRANZBLAU. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to do this interview and answer your questions. Regarding the number of years spent in the Army, it should be noted that I was enlisted in the Cameroonian Defense Forces on May 29, 1998, a total of 24 years. Currently, within the Cameroonian Defense Forces, I am the Deputy Director of Military Justice and Government Commissioner for the Courts of Appeal of the Center, South, East and Littoral Regions.**

**Indeed, with respect to the 1st part of my duties, I assist my boss, the Director of Military Justice, in the missions that are his, such as: questions relating to the organization and functioning of military courts; close monitoring of cases, with particular emphasis on so-called reported cases pending before military courts; the control of the regularity of procedural acts by the various public prosecutor's offices; capacity building for Magistrates and Registrars; the preparation of bills; monitoring the professional training of Military Magistrates and military judicial personnel as well as their management in liaison with the Directorate of Human Resources, the Gendarmerie and the General Staff; compiling clemency and conditional release files; Liaison with the various ministerial departments interested in the operation of Military Justice.**

**With regard to the 2nd part, I am responsible for supporting Public Action concerning all cases judged at the 1st degree by the military courts and having been the subject of appeal. This is basically a summary of the description of the position I occupy, without forgetting the aspect relating to representation when my boss is unable to attend.**

2. What are your main tasks now?

**As Deputy Director of Military Justice, we have 2 types of tasks: These are, on the one hand, administrative tasks and, on the other hand, expertise tasks, in particular hearings; vertical and horizontal consultations. See description above.**

3. Have you always worked in the legal field or have you also been in the military?

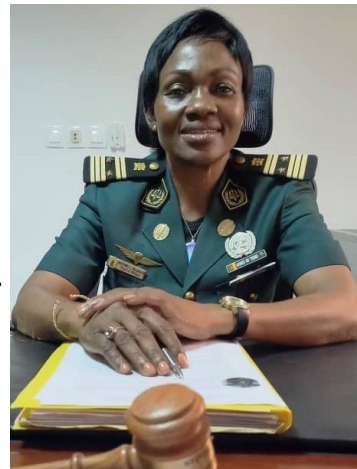
**Indeed, I have always worked in the legal field. In other words, leaving the Joint Military School (EMIA) on October 27, 2000, I was assigned to the Directorate of Military Justice.**

**I have a Master's Degree in French-speaking Private Law. I was admitted in 2003 to the entrance examination to the National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM) and after two years of training, became a Magistrate. At the end, I returned to the Directorate of Military Justice.**

## Interview with Colonel MEFFAND-LOAW Epse ADELO ABANDA continued

In this context, I experienced a normal trajectory whose stages are broken down as follows: Deputy of the Government Commissioner at the Military Court of Yaounde, Investigating Judge in the same Court, Government Commissioner at the Military Court of Bertoua, Judge and Vice-President of the Military Court of Yaounde, President of the Military Court of Bertoua.

Following a call for applications from the United Nations (UN) on behalf of magistrates, I was deployed to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) to the Justice Support Section. While there, I was appointed Team Leader of the Goma Prosecution Support Cell. It is since my return from this mission that I have held the position of Deputy Director of Military Justice. In conclusion, it must be said that I have always served as Lawyer.



4. You were deployed in peacekeeping operations. Could you describe what were your main responsibilities were for this deployment?

Indeed, I was deployed to MONUSCO as an Expert within the mission, specifically as a Prosecution Advisor in the Justice Support Section. In relation to this quality within the Prosecution Support Unit (CAP), my mission was to provide Congolese Military Justice partners with technical support in the investigations, organization and prosecution of the perpetrators of crimes, serious Human Rights violations as foreseen by the Rome Statute; the monitoring of ordinary and mobile hearings. It was a question of providing our partners with technical support before and during the investigations, also during ordinary and mobile hearings; without forgetting the organization of training seminars for Congolese military magistrates and clerks.

5. What did you find particularly interesting or difficult during your deployment?

During the two years and 6 months spent with MONUSCO, I particularly appreciated the sense of leadership, resilience at work, multicultural mixing and stress management.

However, the last months of my mission were very difficult with the devastating experience of the volcanic eruption that occurred in May 2021 when I was 80 km from Goma for a mobile audience. The mission was difficult because we had to adapt to the vagaries. For example, far from imagining this natural disaster before my departure from the city of Goma, I left all my travel documents (passport, vaccination record, and credit cards). It was during these difficult times that I fully integrated the pre-deployment rules and instructions. Failure to comply with these may lead to consequences that you assume individually.

6. If you could give advice to a young military legal advisor preparing to deploy in support of a peace operation, what would it be?

The young Military Legal Adviser who is preparing for a deployment in support of a Peace Operation must have perfect knowledge and mastery of the legal texts that govern his mission. These texts define the legal framework for work. The Military Legal Adviser must always ask themselves the question of knowing: "What do the texts say?" The answer will allow them to better understand the field of action. For this, they will have to be curious, open, impartial, and have the necessary charisma to pass on a better legal technical opinion to the Force Commander, who most often is higher in rank than the legal adviser. In addition, they must be ready to work under pressure in a particularly stressful environment which, despite everything, requires the right legal decisions to be made.

7. You were the first co-chair of the African Military Law Forum (AMLF), along with co-chairs BG Dan Kuwali of the Malawi Defense Forces, and Lieutenant-Colonel Désiré Hakorimana of the Burundi Defense Forces. What do you hope other military law professionals could learn from the AMLF?

What we hope that other legal professionals will learn from the AMLF is the capitalization of its

## Interview with Colonel MEFFAND-LOAW Epse ADELO ABANDA continued

abundant expertise; the appropriation of experiences on cross-cutting issues such as the fight against terrorism, cross-border crime, cybercrime and the adoption of best practices, etc.

8. Is there an area of your professional practice that you find particularly difficult?

Managing human resources in a specialized setting like ours is not always easy. Indeed, reconciling the status of soldier and that of the magistrate or the clerk is not always easy, sometimes one surrenders to the chosen specialty. However, it should always be kept in mind that we are first and foremost soldiers before being specialists in this or that field and therefore likely to also work in operational training. The best management of this duality allows a perfect integration both when one is called upon to exercise in an operational training as in a specialized structure (such as stewardship, the judiciary, medicine, etc.). In any case, you have to know how to shoot all the arrows you carry in your quiver.

9. Are you involved in training or education? if so, in which areas and with which institutions?

Yes, I am involved in training military personnel in general and Military Justice personnel in particular. This is the training of brothers-in-arms admitted to the various courses such as: the Clerks' course at the Armed Forces Specialists Training Center (CISA), the Unit Commander's Course at the Joint Military School, the Staff Certificate at the Staff College, on Military Justice; nationally.

Specifically at the international level, for example, I was invited in December 2017 as a military magistrate, by the Inter Regional Maritime Security Institute (ISMI) in Abidjan (Ivory Coast), as a panelist for sharing my experience on the theme: the repression of Terrorism in the Gulf of Guinea.

10. If you could give any advice to your youngster, including me, regarding working in the military, what would it be?

The young person to whom I would give advice concerning work in the Army is to tell them that you have to like the military profession; subsequently knowing that this job is demanding; we no longer belong to ourselves, but to the nation of which we have chosen to serve with honor and fidelity sometimes up to the supreme sacrifice.

In addition, it must be borne in mind that the first requirement of this profession is discipline, the main strength of armies without which nothing is possible. Finally, the profession of arms requires total loyalty, self-sacrifice, courage, sense of honour and devotion to the country. The soldier, at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances, must demonstrate the moral, physical, intellectual and professional qualities acquired during their training; which are essential to the accomplishment of its mission.

The army does not evolve in a vacuum, they will also have to become fully aware of the changes in the world in which they evolve. This is why, bearing in mind their sovereign missions, they will have to remain professional, adapt and integrate all the contingencies and constraints they will face.

## Coming Soon!

- AMLF's next plenary meeting in Gaborone, Botswana 8-10 August 2022.
- The new Women's African Military Professional Legal Network will be meeting in Gaborone, Botswana on 6 August 2022.
- Invitations sent through US Embassies throughout Africa. We look forward to seeing you there!