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Beatrice Mtetwa, 2011 Inamori Prize Recipient

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Beatrice Mtetwa first received her LLB from the University of Botswana and Swaziland in 1981 and worked as a prosecuting attorney for the following two years. In 1983, Mtetwa decided to move to Zimbabwe, where she continued to work as a prosecutor until 1989. During this work, Mtetwa became increasingly concerned about the selectivity of the prosecutions she was observing. In 1989, Mtetwa moved to private practice, and soon thereafter, she began her highly influential work pertaining to human rights law in 1990.¹

Fueled by a virtuous passion to protect and help people in need, wrongly treated and prosecuted, Mtetwa began her efforts to fight injustice in Zimbabwe. Her work for human rights preservation, especially the rights and treatment of journalists both native to Zimbabwe and those foreign, earned Mtetwa the International Press Freedom Award in 2005. The actions that earned her this award also put her at great personal risk as she threw herself into the frontlines to protect those who needed protection. She was additionally awarded the Burton Benjamin Memorial Award in 2008, making her the first person to ever be honored with both.²

Moving one more year forward, in 2009, Mtetwa was featured in a *New York Times* article for her part in freeing a reporter who had been wrongly arrested and placed into jail in Zimbabwe. Also in 2009, Mtetwa was awarded the Ludovic-Trarieux International Human Rights Prize, reserved each year to a lawyer who has exemplified the global defense of human rights, by activity or suffering, throughout his or her career. She was the second African—the other being Nelson Mandela—to ever receive this honor. 2010 brought Mtetwa the International Human Rights Award from the American Bar Association for her many efforts and successes in the realm of human rights law. Mtetwa is also a founding member and on the board of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights and was the past president of the Law Society of Zimbabwe.³

All these efforts and righteous acts of Mtetwa's led her to be awarded the 2011 Inamori Ethics Prize, presented by the Inamori International Center for Ethics and Excellence. Mtetwa's constant work and placing herself in the middle of conflicts to help those in need was more than enough to secure her place among the other winners of this prize. Since the Inamori Ethics Prize, Mtetwa has continued her fight for the rights of people wrongfully accused and prosecuted.

In 2013, Mtetwa herself fell victim to the types of wrongful prosecution she fights so earnestly to prevent. Mtetwa was at a house when police suddenly arrived and began to forcefully raid it. During their raid, Mtetwa asked for a warrant that would give them permission to search the house upon arrival. The police detained her and claimed that she was shouting at the top of her lungs that their actions were “unconstitutional, illegal, and unlawful.” This case was taken to court, where the court ruled that none of the accusations were warranted or held up enough to continue processes. Rather than discouraging her from future endeavors and efforts, however, this case gave even more fuel to Mtetwa’s righteous fire for human rights.⁴

In 2014, Mtetwa was awarded the International Women of Courage Award for more than twenty years of fighting against global injustice, defending press freedom, and upholding strong rules of law. She often accepted very difficult cases that other lawyers would not want to take on, out of fear of political reprisal. Mtetwa additionally defended two previous Women of Courage Award recipients, Jestina Mukoko and Jenni Williams.⁵

Mtetwa received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Law at their graduation ceremony in December of 2015, along with Dame Janet Smith. The University of Law also published an article in which Mtetwa shares much of her story, and some of the specific detail as to why she chose to pursue human rights as fiercely as she does, and why the opposition and force used by her opponents do not scare her away from fighting for human rights.⁶

Most recently, Mtetwa fought to secure release letters of leaders of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association, taken into custody at the time by the Mugabe regime. This is not unique in the regard that over the past few years, Mtetwa has fought with the Mugabe regime over other critical human rights cases that the regime has brought into being through wrongful and right-infringing persecutions. Mtetwa continues her efforts daily and refuses to back down at the sight of forceful opposition.⁷

Notes

1. “Mtetwa Wins 2010 International Human Rights Award,” *American Bar Association*, https://apps.americanbar.org/litigation/committees/international/ihr_2010.html.

2. “Beatrice Mtetwa,” *Front Line Defenders*, Feb. 15, 2016, www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/beatrice-mtetwa.

3. “Beatrice Mtetwa,” *Front Line Defenders*.

4. “Beatrice Mtetwa,” *Front Line Defenders*.

5. “Beatrice Mtetwa,” *Front Line Defenders*.

6. “Profile: Beatrice Mtetwa, Recipient of U Law Honorary Doctorate 2015,” *The University of Law*, Dec. 4, 2015, www.law.ac.uk/blog/profile-beatrice-mtetwa/.

7. “#IndexAwards2006: Beatrice Mtetwa, Campaigning,” *Index on Censorship*, May 4, 2017, www.indexoncensorship.org/2017/04/indexawards2006-beatrice-mtetwa-campaigning/.