

Ms. Navanethem Pillay

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

“Women's rights are human rights: the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights”

Friday, April 20, 2012

Ms. Navanethem Pillay took over as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on 1st of September 2008.

Ms. Pillay, a South African national, was the first woman to start a law practice in her home province of Natal in 1967. Over the next few years, she acted as a defense attorney for anti-apartheid activists, exposing torture, and helping establish key rights for prisoners on Robben Island.

Ms. Pillay worked as a lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and later was appointed Vice-President of the Council of the University of Durban Westville. In 1995, after the end of apartheid, she was appointed as acting judge on the South African High Court, and in the same year was elected by the United Nations General Assembly to be a judge on the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, where she served a total of eight years, the last four as President from 1999 to 2003. In 2003, she was elected as a judge on the International Criminal Court in Hague, where she remained until August 2008.

In South Africa, as a member of the Women's National Coalition, she contributed to the inclusion of an equality clause in the country's Constitution that prohibits discrimination on grounds of race, religion and sexual orientation. She co-founded Equality Now, an international women's rights organization, and has been involved with other organizations working on issues relating to children, detainees, victims of torture and of domestic violence, and a range of economic, social and cultural rights.

Ms. Pillay received a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Law degree from Natal University South Africa. She also holds a Master of Law and a Doctorate of Juridical Science from Harvard University.