

Commissioner Simitie Lavalý is a qualified barrister and solicitor with a background in criminal law and human rights. She is a graduate in Law and Economics from the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS), University of London and was called to the Sierra Leone Bar in 2008. She also possesses a postgraduate diploma in legal practice from the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol.

After leaving UWE in 2004, Ms Lavalý gained a broad perspective of the legal industry through working as a Caseworker for The Law Society, wherein she investigated complaints made against solicitors practising in England & Wales. In 2008, after being called to the Sierra Leone Bar, she took up a position as a Legal Intern at the Special Court for Sierra Leone in the Hague – the tribunal mandated to try those who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996. During that time she provided support for senior trial lawyers in the Charles Taylor Trial.

Later Ms Lavalý commenced working for AdvocAid, a female-led human rights legal aid organisation and rose from a legal officer to become Executive Director in 2014. During her time at AdvocAid she represented women and men on deathrow, advocated for better conditions for women in detention and engaged stakeholders in the criminal justice system. She also helped develop and disseminate preventative legal education messages through AdvocAid's flagship drama Police Case. Before leaving AdvocAid she instituted the campaign for the decriminalisation and declassification of petty (summary or minor) offences in Sierra Leone and also a police accountability project. In her volunteer capacity, she also became the President of the female lawyer's association, Legal Access through Women Yearning for Equality Rights and Social justice (L.A.W.Y.E.R.S). During her tenure as Project co-ordinator and later L.A.W.Y.E.R.S President, she was instrumental in the establishment and strengthening of regional offices for L.A.W.Y.E.R.S in Kenema and Kono, trained paralegals to provide support services to volunteer lawyers and created a website and Facebook page for the organisation. As a result of her advocacy and influencing work on behalf of women and children, in 2016 she was the Human Rights and Social justice award winner of the Illuminescence National Women's Award (INWA). In 2017 she was the winner of Legal Practitioner of the Year award of the Sierra Leone National Achievement Awards ceremony hosted by AWOL.

Ms Lavalý has practised as a legal practitioner and has successfully represented on appeal more than 8 women and men on death row or serving high prison sentences. She is an advocate for the abolition of the death penalty. She is also an experienced trainer and has developed training manuals for child justice actors, including the judiciary, so that children who come in contact or in conflict with the law are treated fairly and are protected from harm. She is

regularly consulted on legal issues pertaining to criminal justice and women's rights and in 2019 took a key role in reviewing the Sexual Offences Act 2012.

She currently oversees the Directorate of Complaints, Investigations and Legal Services, but also supports the Southern regional office and the Directorate of Gender & Children's Affairs.