

LÍGIA ARCÂNGELA LUBRINO DIAS FONSECA

Professional Profile

Lígia Arcângela Lubrino Dias Fonseca is the mother of a daughter born in 2003, a lawyer, legal consultant, women's rights activist and citizen committed to strengthening the democratic rule of law, advancing equality and defending human dignity.

She graduated in Law from the Faculty of Law of the University of Lisbon in 1987 and began her professional career in Portugal. She subsequently served in the Macao Public Administration in 1989 and 1990, working on legislative drafting and legislative modernisation. Based in Cabo Verde since the early 1990s, she has practised law for more than three decades and provides legal advice to national and international public and private entities.

She participated in the drafting and revision of major foundational legislation in Cabo Verde, including the Criminal Code and, more recently, the Judicial Organisation Act in 2025.

In 2001, she was elected the first woman President of the Cabo Verde Bar Association, a position she held until 2004, becoming a pioneering figure in the institutional representation of the Cabo Verdean legal profession. She is a founding member of the Cabo Verdean Association of Women Lawyers and the Law and Justice Foundation. She was also involved in the creation and establishment of the first higher education institution to offer a law degree in Cabo Verde, the Institute of Legal and Social Sciences.

Co-author of the Guide to Women's Rights, published in 1997, she has devoted a significant part of her public engagement to equality between women and men, women's participation in decision-making, girls' education, the prevention of gender-based violence and the protection of children and people in vulnerable situations.

Her civic engagement extends beyond Cabo Verde. In November 2022, she initiated a letter addressed to the then President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, in which 57 Cabo Verdean women expressed solidarity with Iranian women and called for measures to ensure respect for their lives, freedom and dignity. She also lent her voice to the international mobilisation to prevent legislative setbacks in Africa regarding the criminalisation of female genital mutilation.

In 2024, she joined numerous international human rights organisations in calling on the President of the Republic of Cabo Verde to engage with the President of the Republic of The Gambia in order to prevent the amendment of the law criminalising female genital mutilation in The Gambia, as advocated by several political forces in that country.

From 2011 to 2021, while serving as First Lady of Cabo Verde, she continued to practise law and used her institutional profile to support social causes, promote active citizenship and defend human rights, with particular attention to women, children, young people and the most vulnerable.

Her career has been recognised through several national and international honours. These include the Global Inspirational Leadership Award in 2014; the Woman of Outstanding Leadership Award in 2015; the Grand Cross of the Order of Prince Henry, awarded by the President of the Portuguese Republic in 2017; the Order of the Crown of the House of Orange in 2018; and, in 2019, the DUSUSU Award, in recognition of her commitment to girls' education and the fight against child marriage, as well as the Africa is More Award for her work on behalf of people in vulnerable situations.

In 2021, she was included in the list of 100 personalities from Portuguese-speaking Africa compiled and published by the international platform African Shapers. The selection highlighted leading figures, decision-makers and agents of change from Portuguese-speaking African countries whose work has had a significant impact on the continent.

In 2025, she was honoured by the First Women and Development Forum, held in Praia, as one of 50 women whose strength, vision and legacy have contributed to building a fairer and more inclusive Cabo Verde.