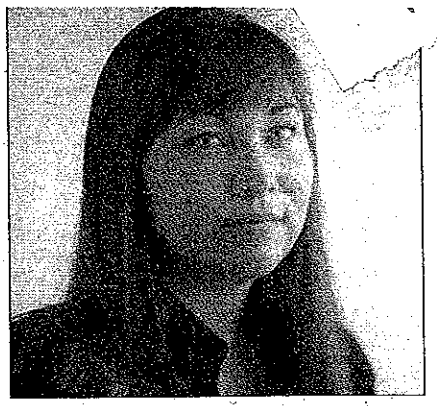

Kildare solicitor, Carolann Minnock, who is working on a justice project in Africa

Kildare solicitor for African legal aid project

A Kildare solicitor has recently been appointed to a legal aid project in Africa, writes Henry Bauress.

Irish Rule of Law International (IRLI) has recently sent three Irish lawyers, including Kildare solicitor, Carolann Minnock, to Malawi.

Carolann, a daughter of Kildare County Council senior official, Peter Minnock, will work on a rule of law project for the coming year partially funded by Irish Aid.

IRLI is non-profit charity established by Law Society and Bar Council.

Carolann will use her Irish legal experience to help the criminal justice sector in Malawi to try alleviate inhumane conditions in prisons by reducing the numbers held in pre-trial detention.

Naas based Carolann said the poor of Malawi face physical, financial and language barriers to legal aid. "Most live in remote rural areas, live on an income of $1 per day, and do not speak English – the language of the court."

Because they have no representation poor Malawians are often held in custody for months, or years, until a trial court acquits or sentences him/her. Prisoners get lost in the system, unsure of charges against them with or how long they will be there," she said.

Carolann is now based in Lilongwe, Malawi working with the Legal Aid Department of Malawi and the Department of Public Prosecutions for one year.

Carolann lived in Lullymore up to age 8 and went to primary school in Rathangan. The family then moved from county Kildare but returned when she was aged 15. She attended St. Mary's College in Naas and Naas "has really been my home since then. "The holder of a BA degree from UCD she is a qualified solicitor and tax consultant. Carolann worked as a trainee solicitor and solicitor with Arthur MacMahon Solictors in Naas before doing commercial law with a company called Invesco for three years.

In 2007 she worked as a legal intern with the United Nations Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Tanzania. This was a war crimes tribunal established to try people responsible for the Rwandan genocide. "When I returned to Ireland I began working as a commercial lawyer but never lost my interest in criminal law."

She volunteered with the Free Legal Advice Centre and the Public Interest Law Initiative. In 2010 she completed a University of London LL.M in public international law which focuses on the effects of imprisonment and international criminal justice systems.

After her masters, she began to look at international opportunities and worked as a programme lawyer with IRLI. On a day to day basis her role has involved working with police prosecutors and attending court.

A keen scuba diver between 2003-2005 she worked in Australia, Thailand and Castlegregory Co. Kerry as a divemaster and scuba diving instructor. She is looking forward to pursing this interest in Lake Malawi.

More information at www.irishruleoflawmalawi.com, or www.irishruleoflaw.ie.