

Louise Arbour

A profile in courage and determination

A commitment to human and individual rights, a readiness to be politically incorrect when necessary, and a dogged determination to get the job done regardless of obstacles—these threads are woven throughout the life and career of Louise Arbour. After serving as Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda from 1996 to September 1999, this distinguished jurist is now to bring her immense talents, courage and determination to the bench of the Supreme Court of Canada.

Born in Montréal in 1947, Madam Justice Arbour attended convent school and earned a name for good grades as well as feisty irreverence. After studying law at the Université de Montréal, she was called to the Quebec Bar in 1971 and to the Bar of Ontario in 1977. Thirteen years of academic work followed, first as Associate Professor of Law and later as Associate Dean at York University's Osgoode Hall Law School. During this period, Ms. Arbour wrote prolifically in both English and French on criminal procedure, human rights and civil rights. As vice-president of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, she campaigned for voting rights for prisoners. Later, serving as counsel for the Association, she successfully argued that defence lawyers should sometimes have access to the sexual records of alleged victims of assault.

Ms. Arbour was appointed to the bench in 1987 as a judge of the Ontario Supreme Court. She later served on the Ontario Court of Appeal; among her judgments there, she ordered an Ontario school board to accept a disabled student in a regular classroom. In 1995, the federal government chose her to lead the investigation into alleged abuses of inmates at the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario.

In February 1996, the UN Security Council appointed her Chief Prosecutor of the

International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda. From the start, Ms. Arbour made it clear that she would pursue her mission unrelentingly. "There is no single issue more important to the survival of these tribunals than the actual arrest of indicted war criminals," she declared. "That will be my very top priority." In the face of pressure from Yugoslavian, Bosnian and Croatian authorities to stall the work, she stood like a rock.

In May 1999, she broke new ground by issuing history's first international warrant for the arrest of a sitting head of state—Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic—plus four political and military leaders on charges of murder and other crimes against humanity. Ms. Arbour made it clear that this was not a symbolic gesture. "As far as I'm concerned," she told the news media at the time, "this indictment is the first chapter. The next chapter is arrest and trial."

Louise Arbour is confident that the next chapter will be written in due course. Seven months after the Yugoslav authorities barred her from Kosovo, she flew into Pristina to inspect the sites of alleged atrocities. "I'm perfectly certain Mr. Milosevic thought he could keep me out of Kosovo," she says. "I believe he can't keep himself out of The Hague." ●

photos: CANAPRESS



Louise Arbour, centre, and team of forensic experts stop at the grave of a teenage girl allegedly executed by Serb forces in the village of Celine, in Kosovo.