

Hello, my name is Ashimedua Okonkwo, and I am the principal of Cyril & Co Solicitors in Balbriggan. I qualified as a solicitor in 2013, and I have been practicing as a sole practitioner since then.

My interest in human rights law began from my travels. I am originally from Nigeria, and I have lived in quite a few places in Europe. I have seen the different parts of human rights, the height of deprivation of people in Africa, and I have seen the breaches of human rights as well in Europe and America. As a lawyer, it's something that you want to do to help people.

All of us require rights, and we're all humans. It means that we should be able to do things and be allowed to do those things without being stopped because of who we are or where we are from. Human rights mean a lot to me because, due to human rights, I've been able to self-actualize to be a solicitor.

I do general practice, really, so I do criminal law, immigration law, law dealing with refugees called international protection, employment law, family law—you name it, I do it.

I have many prized work achievements, but the one that I liked was the one where I was able to stop the deportation of a 20-year-old man suffering mental health difficulties. He came to our island when he was three years old, and he was going to be deported to a country where he knew nobody. He couldn't fill out his immigration forms because he lacked capacity. It was very difficult; it took a long time, but eventually, he was allowed to stay and receive health and treatment here.

I encourage you to study human rights law because it takes you everywhere. There is human rights law in family law, criminal law, even in commercial contracts, and even in commercial litigation—there is human rights everywhere. And also, in relation to disability, it's a big area, and because the people who have disabilities are voiceless, as a lawyer, you are their voice, and you have to stand strong and boldly to defend their rights.