

PROGRESS

Job satisfaction:
Nani has been able to effect societal changes through her work



HOW I BECAME A... HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER

NANI JANSEN REVENTLOW ONCE DREAMED OF BEING A DENTIST BUT FOUND HER FORTE PROTECTING FREEDOMS

INTERNATIONAL human rights lawyer Nani Jansen Reventlow is responsible for groundbreaking freedom of expression cases across the world. Working with the Media Legal Defence Initiative, Nani represented clients or advised on cases in more than 50 national jurisdictions, including the European Court of Human Rights, UNESCO and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Nani, who is based in Oxford and Berlin, is also a fan of Australian medical drama shows - and this almost changed her career path completely. As director of the Digital Freedom Fund, which looks to advance digital rights through strategic litigation, Nani is keynote speaker at next month's Anthropology and Technology Conference.

What did you want to be when you were a child?

When I was little we used to watch the Australian TV show *The Flying Doctors*, so I wanted to be a flying doctor. In reality, I did actually start studying as a dentist with the idea of becoming an oral surgeon, working in developing countries operating on people with cleft palates, because it is something that can actually be treated really easily with the right access to medication and professionals. Things then turned out differently as I didn't really like dentistry school, so I left that after the second year.

At what point did you realise human rights are important?

After I moved on from dentistry, I was still impassioned to do something that really contributed to society. Having done something I didn't enjoy, I was

happy to discover law school and the international human rights system and international law were two topics that really gripped me. As a career, it's a wonderful way to be able to assist individuals and ensure that their rights are protected, but it also can work on a bigger scale. With a really good case you can make a much bigger change compared to getting justice for one person.

How hard is it to become a human rights lawyer?

It is trickier than if you were to pursue a career as a corporate lawyer, for example, as that has a more defined path. There is also a supply and demand challenge as there are a lot of people who are interested and very few jobs to go around. My top advice is to be determined, but also flexible about how you get there.

What other attributes do people need?

I refer to myself as a realistic optimist. You need to see the value in fighting for smaller steps forwards, otherwise you would easily get discouraged. Also, you need to be creative. The law is a wonderful system, so think creatively and figure out how you can maximise it. Just because an approach hasn't been taken before doesn't mean it isn't possible.

What has been your proudest moment?

Winning a criminal defamation case in the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights for a journalist from Burkina Faso, who had been sent to prison for writing something critical about a public prosecutor in the country. This was the first freedom of expression case in this court, which is the African counterpart of

the European Court of Human Rights. We won and the country was ordered to change its legislation, which ensured no one else could be convicted under that law again.

You specialise in looking at the interplay between technology and human rights. Why did you get involved in this field?

This is increasingly the way that our lives are evolving. The idea that there is a separation between online and offline worlds just isn't the case. We are doing more than ever in a digital context from making payments to communicating with family and friends and accessing social benefits. Our online and offline worlds have truly collided. Covid has accelerated this through some of the measures being rolled out to help keep us safe, like contact tracing apps. We need to make sure our human rights are protected in this context.

What is the danger for us?

I think that it is less obvious how much of our rights we are giving up in the digital space through our engagement with technology. As a simple example, when you install an app on your phone, you accept terms and conditions that allow the developer to access data that they could monetise and use to build a profile of you. Seemingly very innocent data can quickly be built up to create a picture of you that maybe you don't want to share, like your sexual preference.

■ Nani is the keynote speaker at the Anthropology and Technology Conference which runs online on October 9 and 12, anthtechconf.co.uk

INTERVIEW BY

OLIVER STALLWOOD

HOW TO BECOME... A SOLICITOR

Becoming a solicitor is not as narrow a path as it might seem. The obvious route is a law degree at university, but a solicitor degree apprenticeship can be used to qualify as a solicitor. This route usually takes around five years, requires three A Levels, and you'll need your employer's support to do it. Keen individuals could also start with a legal firm and do on-

the-job training - try the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEX) Level 6 Professional Higher Diploma in Law and Practice. Whatever the route, as much varied work experience as possible is a huge plus, as well as excellent verbal communication skills and analytical thinking. Salary expectations are between £25,000 and £100,000 a year.

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