Back

The Honourable Louise Arbour

Senior Counsel

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The Honourable Louise Arbour, CC, GOQ has been appointed Governor General-designate of Canada. Louise Arbour served as Senior Counsel at BLG from 2014 to 2026, advising on governance and international disputes while mentoring the next generation of Canadian lawyers.

Read BLG's full statement.

She completed in December 2018 her mandate at the UN as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on International Migration, which led to the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration. She has also held other senior positions at the United Nations, including High Commissioner for Human Rights (2004-2008) and Chief Prosecutor for The International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda (1996-1999).

She formerly sat as a justice of the Supreme Court of Canada from 1999 to 2004, on the Court of Appeal for Ontario and the Supreme Court of Ontario. She chaired an inquiry commission that investigated events at the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario, and has also served as a member of the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security. In 2021 she was appointed to carry out a review into the Canadian Armed Forces and Department of National Defence, in response to reports of harassment and sexual misconduct within Canada's military.

Madam Arbour also formerly served as an *ad hoc* judge in the International Court of Justice, and as a member of the Advisory Panel to the Minister of Defence on Canada's Defence Policy Review. She is currently a member of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, and a member of the board of directors of the Mastercard Foundation.

Madam Arbour has received numerous honorary doctorates and awards. Of particular note, she has been a Companion of the Order of Canada since 2007, a Grand Officer of the Ordre national du Québec since 2009, a Commander of the Légion d'honneur, and a Commander of the Ordre de Montréal.

Experience

- Selected to lead Independent External Comprehensive Review into the current policies, procedures, programs, practices and culture within the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence in response to reports of harassment and sexual misconduct.
- Member of advisory committees of prestigious organizations, including the Advisory Board for the World Bank's Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development.
- Member of the board of the Mastercard Foundation and of the Fondation Mira

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EXPERTISE

Disputes
Appellate Advocacy
Public Policy & Government Relations
Government & Public Sector

International Business & Human Rights

Beyond Our Walls

Professional Involvement

Special Representative of the Secretary-General on International Migration (2017-2018)

President and CEO of the International Crisis Group (2009 to 2014)

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2004 to 2008)

Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada (1999 to 2004)

Chief Prosecutor for The International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda (1996 to 1999)

Member of the Court of Appeal for Ontario (1990 to 1999) (leave of absence from 1996 to 1999)

Member of the Supreme Court of Ontario (High Court of Justice) (1987 to 1990)

Associate Professor at Osgoode Hall Law School (1977 to 1987) and appointed Assistant Dean in 1987

Community Involvement

Co-chair, Campus Montréal Fundraising Campaign

Awards & Recognition

- Recognized in the 2026 edition (and since 2025) of *The Best Lawyers in Canada* (Corporate and Commercial Litigation) and named 'Lawyer of the Year' in 2026 (Corporate and Commercial Litigation)
- Recognized in the 2022 edition of the Top 25 Most Influential Lawyers by Canadian Lawyer Magazine in the Human Rights, Advocacy and Criminal category and in the 2015 edition in World Stage category
- Named laureate of the 2016 Tang Prize in the Rule of Law category
- Recipient of honorary doctorates from 40 universities across Canada and abroad
- Justice Arbour has received some forty medals and awards, notably the Griffin Bell Award for Courageous Advocacy from the American College of Trial Lawyers in 2013; the Council of Europe's North-South Prize in 2010; the United Nations Human Rights Prize in 2008; honorary membership in the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada; the Médaille de la Faculté de droit de l'Université de Montréal in 2003; the Médaille du Barreau in 2001 and the Franklin & Eleanor Roosevelt Freedom from Fear Medal in 2000
- Honorary Member of the New York City Bar Association

Bar Admission & Education

- Québec, 1971
- Law Society of Upper Canada, 1977
- LL.L., Université de Montréal, 1970
- B.A., College Regina Assumpta Montreal, 1967