

KHAWAR QURESHI KC

INTERVIEW BY FINITO WORLD

Of all the things that can happen to you career-wise, to be born with the suspicion that you'd like to be a lawyer is one of the more benign developments imaginable. Salary expectations are good – and if you're interested in legal problem-solving the work has the potential to be reliably interesting and intellectually rewarding.

There are other boons: for instance, there are reliable entry routes thanks to a highly regulated profession; later on there will be clear career progression – whether it be through to KC if you select the barrister route, or through to partner if you opt to be a solicitor.

But a legal career isn't always plain-sailing. Many students suspect the legal profession might be for them, but can't initially decide whether they would prefer the essentially theatrical life of a barrister in court, or the weaving behind the scenes which tends to be the lot of the solicitor. Then once you decide that, there's the further question of which areas to specialise in.

Khawar Qureshi KC is, without doubt, one of the world's leading advocates, and therefore well-placed to answer questions Finito World readers will have about this area. In person he has a powerful quality – a sense of intellectual strength hits you rightaway – and there is also a sort of physical robustness, a leonine nimbleness, suggestive of someone who has been on their feet for much of their career. In this respect, barristers resemble orchestra conductors: physical and mental labour seem to go hand in hand.

The advocate has had a busy year, and recently opened the London office of



McNair International in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The launch of this was a fine event with a definite buzz about it, including a lecture by the revered Judge Abdulqawi Yusuf, a judge of the International Court of Justice and its former President until 2021 on 'Why International Law Matters'. Finito World readers will not be surprised to know that in the era of the Russia-Ukraine conflict it still does.

So what does Qureshi most think is required to be a success in court? Qureshi doesn't miss a beat: "In all walks of life where we assume responsibility for others, there must always be clarity and conviction to do the very best." And what does this mean when it comes to the reality of being an advocate? "As an advocate this means being able to assimilate information rapidly and assessing how best to convey the same to the specific audience - whether it be the International Court of Justice, millions of people watching a live broadcast of a politically charged case, an arbitral tribunal determining a multi-billion dollar claim by a commercial entity against a State, or a domestic court dealing with sensitive intelligence

information. It has been an honour and privilege for me over the course of my career to undertake hundreds of case for parties all over the world- including these types of matters."

So what does Qureshi have to say to young people on the perennial question of whether to be a solicitor or a barrister? "In essence, the barrister who wishes to excel as an advocate must be highly self-reliant, be prepared to work exceptionally hard, enjoy and be stimulated by the prospect of unravelling complex factual and legal issues, so as to convey a case clearly and persuasively," explains Qureshi. He adds: "No barrister can work effectively without an effective team and trust-based approach with solicitors who they work with. Solicitors work in firms and receive salaries, equity partners receiving profits from the firm. Barristers work from case to case."

And no one has a case load quit like Qureshi's case load: to talk with him is to be given numerous asides about matters which have just left his desk, or which are currently being dealt with. These matters all have in common, you sense, their enviousness if one were a barrister, and



their bewildering complexity if you're not.

To be in Qureshi's company is to get a glimpse into an expertise whose enormity you can't fathom: it's like being in the company of a grandmaster chess player.

So what has he learned from dealing with governments worldwide? "I have acted for the UK Government on hundreds of complex and sensitive matters as an "A" Panel Treasury Counsel from 1999-2006 before taking Silk. I have also represented the USA, the Russian Federation, India as well as states such as Kazakhstan and Zambia, and been involved in matters for or against around 70 states in total. Advising and representing any Government is a great honour but comes with considerably more responsibility, as there is always a significant political element and the practical litigation insight available to sophisticated commercial parties may not always be present."

For someone as gifted as Qureshi one might have assumed that he would consider a judicial career, but in fact he

isn't presently considering it. "I enjoy advocacy in complex and challenging cases first and foremost. I enjoy the diversity of work that I am able to undertake for states and clients from all over the world embracing international law, arbitration, commercial litigation and fraud/regulatory matters. Just recently, I have undertaken a case before the High Court of Kenya for the DPP of Kenya against the Deputy Chief Justice of Kenya - the first time an English Silk was instructed to appear before the Courts of Kenya since independence in 1963. I had previously acted for a foreign investor against Kenya."

So what in his opinion makes a good judge? Qureshi says: "A good judge is open-minded, fair and possessed of sound judgment, expertise, integrity and intellect as required to determine difficult issues - all to ensure that justice is done and the rule of law is always upheld."

So what is it ultimately which drives him in his career? Qureshi, who is plainly possessed of an unusually omnivorous

intellect, talks about the way in which the flow of information has changed during the course of his career. "Whereas when I started, hard copy books were the norm, it is a rare treat (unfortunately) to visit a law library. There is now so much more information available through high-speed internet. The challenge is to be able to filter what is credible and relevant."

In which direction does he think the law is currently headed? "Unfortunately, as legal practice has become more "business-like" due to influences that have seeped in, it is sadly increasingly rare to see "justice" and "the rule of law" as the touchstones for legal work (save, some might say, when lip service is being paid to them for "optics"). This is a very unfortunate trend which universities, the legal profession, judges and politicians have a responsibility to address. Legal practice is not a business in the conventional sense which it seems to be increasingly conforming to. Legal practice should always serve to promote human existence and interaction in a manner which protects the weak and vulnerable, not rewarding or being blind to the transgressions of the strong and powerful. Society at large will be much the worse if this trend is not arrested."

It's impossible not to be inspired by Qureshi's new venture. So what's the story behind it? "I strongly believe that international commercial lawyers who are like minded and share a passion for law and justice and enjoy undertaking challenging as well as stimulating work derive greater strength when they come together. McNair International exists to serve that purpose - for individuals from all over the world. I am delighted to have been given the responsibility to continue to take McNair International forward." And meeting him, you're left no doubt that he will – and that more success is around the corner. [f](#)