

Camila Zapata Besso



Call: 2016

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Profile

What the directories say

Camila is ranked as a leading junior in the Legal 500 and Chambers and Partners for 2025. She was ranked as a 'Rising Star' (Tier 1) in 2024 and 2023.

"Camila is a highly astute barrister, who is highly personable and also hugely analytical. Her Spanish language abilities and deep understanding of Latin America add a further layer of expertise in cases involving that region." – Legal 500 2024

"She has my back on complicated cases and her work is exceptional" (Chambers and Partners 2025)

"Her attention to detail is second to none, and her advocacy, as well as her ability to succinctly advise clients, is something to be in awe of" (Legal 500 2025)

"Very hard-working and sharp. She has become a go-to junior." "She has excellent strategic skills. She works with exceptional speed and efficiency." "She produces some of the best drafting I have ever seen. Her worth ethic is great, and she never loses sight of what's important: to fight on behalf of her clients." - Chambers and Partners 2023

Education

LLM in International Law, UCL (Distinction. Top of the year in international refugee law and humanitarian law) [2016-17]

Bar Professional Training Course, City Law School (Very Competent) [2015-16]

Graduate Diploma in Law [2014-15]

BA (Hons) English Literature, University of Bristol [2010-13]

Languages

Spanish

Related practice areas

Administrative & Public Law

Inquests and Public Inquiries

Immigration

Immigration Detention Group

Anti-Trafficking

Actions Against the Police and Public Authorities

International Law

International Human Rights Law

Climate and Environmental Justice

International work

Camila has experience in public international law, international tortious claims and international disciplinary proceedings. Her international human rights work focusses on protecting the rights of vulnerable communities, including Indigenous peoples. She is in the Council of Europe pool of experts for the provision of consultancy services in the areas of migration and asylum.

International work to date includes the following:

- Assisting the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Dr Alice Edwards, on the relevant international law applicable to hostage-taking and torture, in preparation of her report on **hostage-taking as torture** (led by Tatyana Eatwell).

- Leading the drafting of a fact-finding report by a group of international lawyers on Nepal's delayed transitional justice process in respect of its 1996 – 2006 civil war, titled '**Peace without Justice and Accountability? A caution against impunity in post-conflict Nepal**'.
- Contributing **written observations** to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in respect of its Advisory Opinion on the Climate Emergency and Human Rights.
- Being the lead drafter of an international lawyers' fact-finding report titled "*We are not trespassers, this is our land*": *Agrarian Conflict and Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Alta Verapaz*, which addresses the extreme human rights challenges suffered by rural Indigenous campesino communities in Guatemala, in the context of profound land inequality, poverty, administrative obstacles and legal insecurity, compounded by the severe impacts of the climate crisis.
- Making an **amicus curiae submission** to the Colombian Constitutional Court in a case brought by Wayúu indigenous peoples against Carbones del Cerrejón mining company (now owned by Glencore), involving the rights of the Wayúu to their ancestral river (the 'Arroyo Bruno') under international human rights and international environmental law.
- Drafting an **amicus curiae submission** before the Colombian Constitutional Court in a case between the national army and the San José de Apartadó Peace Community, concerning the right to freedom of expression of human rights defenders working in the midst of a post-conflict situation (led by Kirsty Brimelow KC).
- Reporting on the criminal trial of Santiago Uribe, the brother of former Colombian president Álvaro Uribe Vélez, in the 'Twelve Apostles' paramilitary group case, on behalf of the **Bar Human Rights Committee**.
- Advising Indigenous communities in an international civil claim against transnational mining corporations (led by Richard Hermer KC, Robert Weir KC and Russell Hopkins).
- Advising an Indigenous community in respect of their participation as a non-disputing party in an extractive industry-related dispute before the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes ('ICSID').

- Acting for an individual subject to the internal disciplinary proceedings of an international financial institution, resulting in all the complaints against the individual (including conflict of interest and corruption) being dismissed (assisting Alex Haines).
- Acting as an **international electoral observer** at the 2020 Bolivian Presidential elections.

Camila is fluent in Spanish and a Colombia-UK dual national.

Administrative and Public Law

Camila represents clients in judicial review claims, including on an urgent basis, in the Administrative Court and Upper Tribunal. These include challenges to fresh claim decisions, certification, immigration detention, removal, trafficking, asylum support and the issuance of passports.

Camila was in the legal team (led by Laura Dubinsky KC) that successfully challenged the unlawful detention and mistreatment of immigration detainees held at Manston House, a Short-term Holding Facility in Kent, which was described in the media as “the first refugee camp on British soil”. The high-profile legal challenge resulted in Manston House being emptied.

Other work includes acting for the victim in an Article 3 ECHR (investigative duty)-related JR (led by Nick Armstrong KC), and representing the Seven Sisters’ ‘Pueblito Paisa’ Latin Village market traders in a planning JR (led by Marc Willers KC).

Civil Claims Against Public Authorities

Camila advises claimants in civil damages claims against the police, prisons and Home Office, including false imprisonment, assault, malicious prosecution, misfeasance in public office and claims under the Human Rights Act 1998. She represents bereaved family members in inquests engaging Article 2 ECHR.

She acted for the intervener (the Anti-Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit) in *RN v CICA* [2023] EWCA Civ 882 (led by Maya Sikand KC and Shu Shin Luh), now the lead authority on the definition of a crime of violence under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme 2012.

She acted for the claimant in *TPKN v Ministry of Defence* [2019] EWHC 1488 (QB) (assisting Una Morris). The primary issue was whether the Ministry of Defence could be held vicariously liable for the rape of the claimant by a fellow soldier on base, following a social event. The claimant successfully appealed against summary judgment/strike out on all grounds.

During her pupillage at Garden Court Chambers Camila worked on statutory criminal appeals against conviction for victims of human trafficking (including *R v L*; *R v N* [2017] EWCA Crim 2129), and drafted grounds of referral to the Criminal Cases Review Commission. She also did criminal trials, bail and sentencing hearings, contested Proceeds of Crime Act proceedings and Criminal Behaviour Order hearings in the Crown, Magistrates and Youth Courts.

Immigration: Asylum and Human Rights

Camila is regularly instructed to appear in complex asylum, human rights and deport appeals for vulnerable adults and children. She has particular experience representing victims of human trafficking, torture and sexual violence, unaccompanied minors, individuals with mental health needs and those who lack capacity.

She is developing a practice in asylum claims involving national security issues and concurrent extradition proceedings.

She is in the Council of Europe pool of experts for the provision of consultancy services in the areas of migration and asylum.

Background

Before coming to the Bar, Camila volunteered at a human rights consultancy in Colombia, Grenfell Legal Support, the Free Representation Unit, the United Migrant Workers Education Programme at Unite the Union, and Survival International. She completed her LLM thesis under the supervision of Professor Roger O'Keefe on the protection of indigenous culture

under international human rights and cultural heritage law (first class).

Camila competed in the national and international rounds of the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot in 2017, and won the prize for being the best individual oralist and having the best written pleadings in the UK, following the UK final judged by Sir Michael Wood KC. Camila has since enjoyed helping students develop their advocacy skills by judging at the Jessup, and at moots at the London School of Economics and the University of Durham.

Camila is on the Executive Committee of the Human Rights Lawyers' Association. She was formerly on the International Committee and the Equality, Diversity and Social Mobility Committee of the Bar Council.

Camila is fluent in Spanish and a Colombia-UK dual national. She is in the Council of Europe pool of experts for the provision of consultancy services in the areas of migration and asylum.

Pro Bono

Camila regularly accepts domestic and international pro bono instructions from NGOs including Advocate, Bail for Immigration Detainees, ABColombia, the Colombian Caravana and the Alliance for Lawyers at Risk.

Publications

Report by Independent Delegation of International Lawyers to Nepal: ‘Peace without Justice and Accountability - A caution against impunity in post-conflict Nepal’ (2024)

Report by the Independent Delegation of International Lawyers to Guatemala: “‘We are not trespassers: this is our land” - Agrarian conflict and Indigenous peoples’ rights in Alta Verapaz’ (2023)

Press release: International legal experts call for urgent action to protect Indigenous peoples; express grave concern at impact of violent forced evictions in Guatemala (2023)

Joint amicus curiae submission filed before the Constitutional Court of Colombia in the ‘Arroyo Bruno’ dispute between members of the Wayu?u indigenous community of La Guajira and Carbones del Cerrejo?n Limited, as well as various Colombian state agencies (2022)

Interim observation report on the Trial of Santiago Uribe Vélez in the matter of ‘the Twelve Apostles’ (2021)

Joint amicus curiae submission filed before the Colombian Constitutional Court in relation to the San José de Apartadó Peace Community’s appeal against the court’s judgment in favour of the National Army’s Seventeenth Brigade, concerning the right to freedom of expression of human rights defenders working in the midst of post-conflict situations (**Spanish only**) (2021)

Asylum Research Centre publishes its major 'Comparative Analysis of US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (2016-2019)' yielding interesting results on the reliability of reports produced by the Trump administration (2020)

Joint report of the Independent International Election Observation Mission to the Bolivian Presidential Elections (2020)

‘COVID 19: Implications for bail hearings’ (2020)

‘Ministry of Defence can be vicariously liable for rape committed on base’ (2019)

‘The right of refugee-receiving states to compensation: a ‘general framework’ under the international law of state responsibility’ (2018)

‘Hill Immunity Revisited: The Beginning of the End?’ (2018)

‘Colombia’s human rights warriors are marginalized and stigmatised’ (2016)