

## Rising Star: Crowell & Moring's Randa Adra

By Joyce Hanson

*Law360 (August 8, 2024, 2:03 PM EDT)* -- Randa Adra of Crowell & Moring LLP helped lead a \$1.7 billion arbitration between an Egyptian state agency and Damietta International Port Co., playing a significant role in the infrastructure dispute involving complex financial and engineering issues and landing her among the international arbitration attorneys under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Star

### Her biggest achievement:

Adra said the \$1.7 billion "extremely high stakes" wrongful termination case over a giant infrastructure project has been her biggest career achievement so far. The commercial arbitration, governed by Egyptian law between state agency Damietta Port Authority and DIPCO, ultimately secured a \$494 million victory favoring Crowell & Moring client DIPCO and defeated the entirety of the DPA's \$500 million counterclaim.

Adra started working on the arbitration before the International Chamber of Commerce when she was a junior associate. The dispute stemmed from the agency's decision to scrap its 2006 contract with the company to build a new container terminal at the Mediterranean Sea port.

Adra said she led the drafting of four submissions totaling hundreds of pages, written in both English and Arabic. The ICC case finally settled in February 2020 and led to multimillion-dollar spinoff arbitration matters that have kept her busy.

For years, Adra oversaw day-to-day case management with the client's representatives, witnesses and local counsel, many of whom only conversed in Arabic. She also served as a leader at a hearing in Cairo, where she conducted a portion of the opening statement as well as cross-examinations and redirect examinations.

"Arabic was the language of the arbitration chosen by the parties, and at the outset, I was the only attorney of the Crowell team who was fluent in Arabic," Adra said.

2024

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**RISING  
STAR**



**Randa Adra**

Crowell & Moring

**Age:** 35

**Home base:** New York City

**Position:** Partner

**Law school:** Cornell University  
Law School

**First job after law school:**  
Associate at Crowell & Moring

Crowell & Moring eventually added team members, but Adra said she was responsible for leading the team of attorneys and paralegals as they drafted, reviewed and revised the bilingual briefings. She added that she was the only woman with a speaking role in the hearing room filled with arbitrators, witnesses, experts and lawyers.

"It was hard to be the only woman in that room in a Middle Eastern country and be taken seriously," Adra said. "I would guess that if one of the arbitrators was a woman, a lot of the comments that were made would not have taken place."

### **Her proudest moment as an attorney:**

Adra takes pride not only in her client-focused practice as an international arbitration attorney, but also in the work she does on pro bono cases and advocacy for change in the legal industry.

For example, in her pro bono practice she has helped Middle Eastern women gain asylum when they have suffered violence in their home countries. Adra has worked with the Tahirih Justice Center on the Afghan Asylum Project, which offers a toll-free helpline to Afghan citizens who are recent arrivals in the U.S. It conducts legal screenings with anyone presenting gender-based asylum claims for potential representation by Tahirih staff's and pro bono network.

"Every legal success on behalf of clients that I do, and in particular the pro bono work, means they are literally entrusting me with their lives in some instances. Those are certainly moments of pride," Adra said.

But what stands out to her most is a passion project she joined in with four other international arbitration practitioners in 2022 to cofound ArabArb, a global association that aims to unite the international arbitration community in the Arab world.

"When we had our ArabArb launch event, individuals in the arbitration community came up to me, saying, 'Oh, we really needed this. We're so excited. We don't have a space where we can support each other and know who else is involved in this industry and mentor each other,'" Adra said. "Hearing that from our members was so rewarding."

Adra also serves as co-chair of the Women's Leadership Initiative at Crowell & Moring, where she looks to support women attorneys and professional staff in getting the empowerment they need to succeed in a legal career.

"I bring that spirit of trying to amplify the voices of those who don't have a stage or don't have much space in the legal community," she said.

### **Why she's an international arbitration attorney:**

Adra views herself as a global citizen, saying she grew up in Beirut and currently lives in the U.S. She speaks French as well as English and Arabic, and is familiar with living a life that means traveling between countries.

"I have spent every opportunity to travel the world and immerse myself in other cultures," Adra said. "When it came to choosing a practice, I knew it was a top priority to find something that would allow me to travel and keep immersing myself in different cultures, and stay open to the possibility of relocating,

particularly to the Middle East."

Adra was "hooked" on international arbitration ever since she tackled her first matter, she said. Not only does she have a global practice, but international arbitration allows her to immerse herself in different cultures, languages and legal systems. "It's dispute resolution at its most challenging but also its most creative," she said.

Adra's first matter involved a confidential commercial arbitration involving a hotel dispute over the termination of a management agreement for Marriott International Hotels Inc. The dispute between developer Ziad Fakhri and Marriott goes back to 1999, when he accused it of breaking a contract to run the Beirut Marriott Hotel, which he owned through his firm Jnah Development SAL.

Adra initially worked on the Marriott matter as a summer associate, and more recently she served as a leader on successfully representing the hotel giant in an ICC arbitration governed by French law seeking revision of two related awards. On March 31, the tribunal issued a final award in Marriott's favor.

#### **What motivates her:**

Earning the trust of her clients and colleagues and setting an example for her children are Adra's two biggest motivators.

Since legal services is a relationship business, she believes that earning and maintaining trust is at the heart of her practice.

"To earn that trust is no small feat," Adra said. "It can happen with a big win, which is always great, but in my experience most of the time it's actually earned in many small moments: When a client reaches out with a time-sensitive question and needs a quick answer that's the right answer, or when they need a creative solution to a challenge that they're facing."

As for setting an example for her children, she noted that she didn't grow up with a lot of examples of working mothers. So being able to set an example for her sons — ages 1 and 3 — as a mom who also has a demanding career stands out as a great motivator for Adra.

"Actually," she said, "I came back from maternity leave and found out that I was elected to the partnership. I had big changes in my life, which were tough but rewarding. I have these people who are looking up to me now and that I want to set an example for, and I hope it will be motivating for them to see me do both things."

#### **How her practice will change in the next 10 years:**

There's a thirst in the international arbitration community for a return to basics, according to Adra. She hears from frustrated clients who say they long for the earlier days of efficiency and flexibility that used to be the hallmark of the arbitration industry. Lately, they're experiencing longer arbitrations that can be more expensive than courtroom proceedings.

In the next 10 years, Adra believes, arbitration practitioners, tribunals and institutions will all recognize that inefficiency and high costs are a problem, and they'll start to rely more on emergency measures for relief in matters even before an arbitration tribunal has been formed.

"I'm already seeing parties relying on those in their agreements at the outset because they want to

ensure efficient resolution of disputes," she said. "In addition to relying on technological advances, greater automation and virtual hearings — which we all became accustomed to over the past few years — we will see a push to reinvigorate the original promise of international arbitration, which was a more efficient means of resolving disputes."

*--As told to Joyce Hanson. Editing by Adam LoBelia.*

*Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2024 Rising Stars winners after reviewing nearly 1,200 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2024, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.*

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