**Profile of Kenya’s First Attorney General – Charles Mugane Njonjo**

**Full Name:** Charles Mugane Njonjo  
 **Born:** 23 January 1920, Kibichiko Village, Kikuyu, Kiambu County, Kenya  
 **Died:** 2 January 2022, Nairobi, Kenya (aged 101)  
 **Position:** First Attorney General of Independent Kenya (1963–1979)

### **Early Life and Education**

Charles Njonjo was born into a prominent Kikuyu family. His father, Josiah Njonjo, was a colonial chief and among the first Africans to work in the British colonial system. This background afforded Njonjo access to quality education both in Kenya and abroad.

He attended Alliance High School, then proceeded to Fort Hare University in South Africa. Later, he studied law in the United Kingdom at Gray’s Inn and the University of Exeter, becoming a barrister and qualifying to practice law in England. This exposure placed him among a rare cadre of highly educated Africans in the colonial and post-colonial period.

### **Career and Role in Government**

**Attorney General of Kenya (1963–1979):** Upon Kenya’s independence in 1963, Njonjo was appointed the country’s first Attorney General by President Jomo Kenyatta. He served for 16 years, the longest tenure for an Attorney General in Kenya’s history.

As AG, Njonjo was the chief legal advisor to the government. He played a key role in shaping Kenya’s legal framework in the immediate post-independence years, including helping to transition from colonial laws to a sovereign legal system. His legal acumen and conservative interpretation of the law earned him the nickname “The Duke of Kabeteshire,” referencing both his elite demeanor and his loyalty to British traditions.

**Key Contributions:**

* He defended the rule of law and the centralization of state power under President Kenyatta.
* Played a role in key prosecutions and legal decisions that affected the state’s political landscape.
* Oversaw the drafting and interpretation of Kenya's early legal frameworks and statutes.
* Known for his influence in maintaining order in a young, politically volatile nation.

### **Later Career and Politics**

In 1979, Njonjo resigned as AG and entered elective politics, becoming the MP for Kikuyu and later appointed Minister for Constitutional Affairs under President Daniel arap Moi.

However, in 1983, he was implicated in an alleged coup plot against President Moi, leading to a public commission of inquiry famously known as the “Njonjo Commission.” Though he was never convicted, the scandal marked the end of his political career, and he quietly withdrew from public life.

### **Legacy**

Charles Njonjo is remembered as a towering legal mind and a symbol of state authority in Kenya’s formative years. While some criticized his authoritarian tendencies and elitism, others lauded his loyalty, integrity, and commitment to the stability of the young republic.

**Notable Facts:**

* He was known for his impeccable British mannerisms, always dressed in pinstripe suits and carrying a black umbrella.
* He lived to be 101 years old, making him one of Kenya’s longest-living senior statesmen.
* A staunch monarchist and Anglophile, he was famously known to discourage any disrespect toward the British royal family.