



NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

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OPENING REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION, MR YAKUBU CHONOKO MAIKYAU, OON, SAN, AT OEPNING CEREMONY OF THE 64TH ANNUAL GENERAL CONFERENCE HELD ON SUNDAY, 25 AUGUST 2024 AT EKO HOTEL AND CONFERENCE CENTRE, VICTORIA ISLAND, LAGOS

Last year, the theme of the Conference was *Getting it Right: Charting the Course for Nigeria's Nation Building*. It explored key aspects of nation-building from the perspective of Security, Economy, and the Administration of Justice. The decision to broaden the conversation beyond a typical law conference was made in recognition of the interconnectivity of the various factors influencing Nigeria's progress. The insights and outcomes gleaned from these engagements have served as tools for our continued dialogue with Government and other relevant stakeholders in Nigeria's nation building, for ourselves as an association and on behalf of the people of our dear Country.

We were privileged to have the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR declare the 2023 Annual General Conference open and deliver a riveting speech that elicited a standing ovation at the Opening Ceremony. His Excellency the President made a call on members of the legal profession and other Nigerians alike, to commit, in the President's words, to *"a change of mind, a change of attitude and a change of approach to governance"* in order to exploit our great potentials for the benefit of the people. This year, we aim to build on the progress achieved through last year's conversations and subsequent collaborations with Government and other stakeholders within and outside Nigeria.

In coming up with the theme of this year's Conference – *Pressing Forward: A National Posture for Rebuilding Nigeria* – we were primarily motivated by the scripture in Philippians 3:14 where Apostle Paul, in a deep and clear expression of the understanding of his calling said– I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. While the NBA AGC is not a religious gathering, we as legal practitioners can learn from this, remind ourselves of the noble call upon us to provide guidance to the people in protecting their rights and advancing the cause of our nation, to remain focused, resolute and fix our gaze on the lofty goals of this call which only the legal profession is privileged to undertake. This unique dual responsibility of legal practitioners, either serving on the bench or at the Bar was succinctly encapsulated in the immortal words of Sir Christopher alexander Sapara Williams (the first Nigerian to be called to the English Bar) , that *"the legal practitioner lives for the direction of his people and for the advancement of the cause of his country"* This privilege no doubt, comes with corresponding responsibilities which brings to mind another equally immortal words by the legendary jurist, Sir Adetokunbo Ademola, CJN (the first indigenous Chief Justice of Nigeria), who noted that *"The respect in which the Bar in any country is held is the best indicator of the freedom in that country."* And we can only get to be respected when we, as members of the legal profession, discharge our dual functions mentioned above, not only creditably, but also as of necessity, honestly, professionally, and ethically – always motivated primarily by the need to serve justice to the people.

To realise this objective, we must all have *"a change of mind, a change of attitude and a change of approach to governance."* It is in this regard that we found the traits of the eagle as ideal prescription which, if imbibed with renewed hope, will shape our posture towards the recovery, reformation, and repositioning that we dearly yearn for our dear nation. This explains the design of the conference theme, which displays an eagle carrying aloft on its wings the insignia of the Nigerian Bar Association. The symbolism is a clear reminder of our role in society and our duty to

NATIONAL OFFICERS:

Yakubu Chonoko Maikyau, OON, SAN President

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the people of Nigeria, and that we can only deliver on this all-important assignment if we assume the posture and traits of an eagle. The eagle has strong vision, it is tenacious and a highflyer. The eagle does not mingle with vultures. It is not found in the midst of mediocre. The eagle does not feed on dead meat – dead meat for me, is likened to corruption. If we imbibe the traits of the eagle as we press forward to rebuild our dear country, Nigeria, we must all eschew corruption at all levels and be deliberately purposeful in instituting people-centred programmes and policies by the leadership, which must as a corresponding duty, be owned by the followership. Eagles are strong birds. The eagle in Nigeria's Coat of Arms signifies strength and Nigeria is a country of tremendous strength. Finally, the eagle nurtures its younger ones to realise their capabilities and attain independence. This is our charge to the leadership in this Nation. This prescription is equally for all Nigerians in various spheres of endeavours.

Learned Colleagues, our annual conference, as always, provides a veritable platform for knowledge exchange, as we bring together thought leaders and policy makers in various spheres of endeavour including business, academia, the corporate world, and civil society. Of great delight to me and I am sure to many of you, is the fact that our Keynote Speaker for this year's conference is none other than Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, GCON, the Director-General of the World Trade Organisation and one of Nigeria's leading lights on the world stage.

As a distinguished Nigerian and development economist par excellence, with a stellar career spanning several decades of national, international, and global impact, it is our honour and privilege to have Dr. Okonjo-Iweala deliver the Keynote Address at this Opening Ceremony. If one sets out to look for a Nigerian who has exhibited the traits of an eagle and you met Dr Okonjo-Iweala, you will look no further.

The decision to invite her as Keynote Speaker came after careful consideration. As the first woman and first African to lead the World Trade Organisation, a former Managing Director of World Bank, the first woman to serve as Nigeria's Finance Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister, amongst others, she is no doubt a role model and an inspiration to all of us and, particularly, to women in Nigeria and beyond. Of the about 145, 000 lawyers on the Roll of the Supreme Court of Nigeria, nearly 70% are females, many of whom overcame great challenges to become lawyers, I can therefore say without fear of contradiction, that Dr Okonjo-Iweala's personality resonates with majority of the members of the Nigerian Bar Association.

Beyond shattering glass ceilings to get into those positions, she challenged the status quo and made significant positive changes which left no one in doubt that she was eminently qualified to take on those responsibilities.

This administration has been deliberate about projecting the place of women in our profession and preparing them for leadership positions. For the first time in the 64-year history of the NBA, the conference planning committee is being headed by a team made up exclusively of our female colleagues with Oyinkansola Badejo-Okusanya, as the Chairperson the 2024 Annual General Conference Planning Committee (AGCPC). We have Amina Suleiman Kaoje as the Alternate Chair, Laura Alakija as Secretary, with Chika Okolie as the Alternate Secretary. The excellence you now see, and you will yet encounter in the course of this Conference is largely a function of the AGCPC led by these women and I extend my profound gratitude to the Committee on behalf of the Bar.

In the next two days, we will have 1 Plenary Session and 31 Breakout Sessions, comprising different topic curated around the security, economy, administration of justice and professional development. This has been the areas of focus over the two-year period of our administration.

In conclusion, we are grateful to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, particularly for his demonstrated commitment to sustainable reforms in the justice sector. His Excellency undoubtedly realises that reforms in the Justice is a sine qua no to achieving the vision of his administration for socio-economic and political development, with the attendant prosperity for the good people of Nigeria.

His Excellency, the Vice President, Alhaji Kashim Shettima, GCON, through our interactions, has shown a clear understanding of the core issues and challenges bedevilling the administration of justice system. our every interaction with him always yields forward-looking proposals, some of which we have appropriated for the purpose of our advocacy on the reform of key justice institutions.

I have at every public occasion and fora mentioned that the choice of Prince Lateef Fagbemi, SAN as the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice is a choice well-made. The evidence lies in the rapid progress that have been made both in the area of administration of justice reform, public interest issues, and the professional development legal practitioners.

I want to specially acknowledge the presence of His Excellency, Mr John Dramani Mahama, the former President of the Republic of Ghana, for coming all the way to grace this event and to share from his wealth of knowledge and experience. This is a huge sacrifice, seeing that His Excellency is in the middle of his campaigns for the presidential elections coming up in December this year. We thank Your Excellency for honouring us with your presence. As long as the earth remains, seed time and harvest shall not cease, and what a man sows, that he shall reap. Your Excellency has sown honour in the ground of the NBA – which is a fertile ground and will certainly reap honour in return. We are grateful.

Finally, I will not end without specially expressing our immense gratitude to the Governor of Lagos State, Mr Babajide Sanwo-Olu, for once again graciously playing host to the Nigerian Bar Association. We thank Mr Governor, and we are very grateful for the leadership qualities he brings to bear in the affairs of Lagos State.

In conclusion, we have planned this conference to be a conference like never before. I want to urge all participants to take full advantage of the knowledge of the array of our distinguished speakers from across the globe. I, therefore, call on all of us to dip ourselves into this knowledge-sharing exercise, as we equip ourselves with the necessary tools to press forward towards rebuilding Nigeria.

Lastly, recognising that nature abhors vacuum, the members of the NBA, on 20th July 2024, went to the polls and have elected my successor, Mazi Afam Josiah Osigwe, SAN who will, by the grace of God Almighty, lead our newly elected National Executive Committee for the next two year. Congratulations, the Golden Boy of NBA.

I thank you for your attention.


Yakubu Chonoko Maikyau, OON, SAN
PRESIDENT