



NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT: NBA House, Plot 110/1 Muhammed Buhari Way, Cadastral Zone A00, Central Business District, Abuja - Nigeria. Tel:+234810 402 5812
www.nigerianbar.org.ng

31st December 2020

To: All Lawyers in Nigeria

MONTHLY REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE NBA: (NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2020)

Dear Learned Colleagues and Friends,

I trust you have been well and safe.

It has been two (2) months since I last wrote to you and I thought to round off the year today by providing you with an update on some of my activities in office in the months of November and December 2020. For details of my activities in my first two months in office (September and October 2020), please refer to my previous monthly reports which can be accessed via this link: <https://nigerianbar.org.ng/presidents-statement-0>.

A quick highlight of some of our administration's activities in November and December 2020 are as follows:

1. **An Improved and Efficient Insurance Cover for Lawyers:** As part of our commitment towards the welfare of lawyers, my team and I met with the Chief Executive Officer of Leadway Assurance to discuss the breadth of the insurance cover which they provide to our members. As you may be aware, the NBA currently provides certain insurance cover at no additional cost to its financial members through Leadway Assurance. This is different from the health insurance cover which we are working on institutionalising. Our meeting sought to expand the scope of the insurance cover for lawyers, increase by 100% the insurance payout to our members and to ease the process of making claims. The meeting yielded positive results which will be communicated in the New Year.

On a related but separate note, we ensured that all eligible but outstanding payments of death benefits or claims submitted to, or pending at, the NBA both before and during my administration were settled. Our goal is to coordinate the prompt settlement of all eligible claims going forward.

2. **Access to Finance, et al:** I also met with the MD/CEO of Access Bank to discuss delivery of value adding services for the benefit and welfare of our members. Among other things, the meeting focused on the need to set up/revitalize an access to finance scheme for lawyers on concessionary terms (a priority project of my administration that I will make further reference to in this report).
3. **The NBA's Position on National Issues:** My administration has remained committed and is consistently taking steps to ensure that the Bar remains the conscience of the society and a clear voice on all national issues. During the period under review, we,

NATIONAL OFFICERS

Olumide A. Akpata, President

Joyce Oduah, General Secretary; John Aikpokpo Martins, 1st Vice President; Debo Adeyemo kazeem, 2nd Vice President; Mercy Ijato Agada, Treasurer; Oluakunle Edun, Welfare Secretary; Raphael Nnamdi Anagor, Financial Secretary; Dr. Rapuluchukwu Nduka, Publicity Secretary; Uchenna Nwadialo, Assistant Secretary; Ferdinand Naza, Assistant Publicity Secretary

among other things, took a firm stand on, and intervened in, the infamous killings in Oyigbo community; intervened in the freezing of accounts and seizure of passports of some known #ENDSARS advocates; reiterated at different times the NBA's position that respect for the fundamental rights of citizens is non-negotiable; and in the wake of kidnapping of scores of school boys in Katsina, we called on the Service Chiefs to live up to their responsibilities or resign from their positions as Nigerians would no longer accept the mediocre performance recorded in addressing the insecurity challenges in our nation. We will continue to add our voice in the call for good governance and accountability.

4. **Police Reforms:** In line with the expressed commitment of the NBA to provide institutional support towards the reform of the Nigerian Police, I served as a panellist at the Legislative Agenda and Public Policy Dialogue Series organised by the House of Representatives on 'Policing and Human Rights in Nigeria'. The Panel discussed amongst other issues, the proposed Police Service Commission (Reform) Bill 2020, which the NBA actively participated in preparing. The Bill has now passed 2nd reading. I also participated at a Town Hall meeting on Police Reforms hosted by Channels Television. These are in addition to other steps that we are taking in this respect. Indeed, the NBA, under my watch, is now playing very active and diverse roles on the holistic reforms of the Police in Nigeria.
5. **NBA Legislative Agenda:** Taking an active interest and participating in the law-making process is at the core of NBA's duty to the society. This will not only ensure that our laws are current and fit for purpose but will also ensure that better laws are made for the good and advancement of the society. In this respect, my office has during this period been engaging the National Assembly on a collaboration that will see the NBA providing technical and specialist support to the legislature on key bills that are presented for enactment. The NBA will play this role through an adequately resourced law reform committee (with a secretariat at the National Assembly) that will, *inter alia*, act as a liaison between the NBA and the National Assembly and represent the NBA at public hearings by the legislature. Some work has already begun on this collaboration and detailed reports on our progress and activities in this space will be communicated in the New Year.
6. **National Executive Committee Meeting (NEC):** We recently held the first regular meeting of the NEC during my administration on 15 December 2020 (the NEC is the highest decision-making body in the NBA after the Annual General Meeting). At the meeting, several policy directives and guidance were given to my team, and many key decisions were taken including approval of the co-opted members of NEC whom I nominated, approval of a number of projects that my team and I presented to NEC and approval for the establishment of different committees to drive the policies and agenda of the current administration. A communique outlining the key decisions reached at the NEC meeting will be circulated separately.
7. **Launching of Eight (8) Priority Projects:** Following the recently concluded NEC meeting at which we received approval for eight (8) priority projects of my

administration, we have started taking active steps towards achieving the objectives of the said projects in the New Year. The approved priority projects are:

- (a) **Project Do Good** – this is our public interest and society focused project that has been initiated to drive our vision of intervening in relevant matters of public interest.
- (b) **Project Benjamin** - the primary focus of this project is to design a workable and enforceable framework under which lawyers will (i) charge the right fees for their legal services using acceptable and realistic metrics; and (ii) ensure that lawyers in paid employment earn reasonable living wages and emoluments.
- (c) **Project WAY (Who Are You)**– this is our digital NBA Project. The goal of this project is to digitise most of our processes at the NBA and issue a proper multi-purpose means of identification to our members.
- (d) **Project Dignity** - this focuses primarily on restoring and protecting the dignity of our members by addressing the wanton abuse and harassment of lawyers carrying on their legitimate businesses.
- (e) **Project Enhancement** – this involves the reactivation of the NBA Human Rights Institute; establishment of a Career Development Centre and the empowerment of the NBA Institute of Continuing Legal Education to drive our agenda around capacity building and assist our members to diversify their practice areas and methods, deepen competencies and expand the frontiers of legal practice, which in turn will create more wealth and career options for lawyers. It is my hope that through this project, these ideals will become entrenched and institutionalised at the NBA beyond my administration.
- (f) **Project Well-being** - as part of my administration’s wellness program for lawyers, we are currently in discussions with reputable Health Management Organisations for the establishment of a scheme that will enable our financial members to access affordable health insurance across the country. Project Well-being is the platform through which we will drive this scheme.
- (g) **Project Exchequer** – this project is squarely about developing a framework that will make it easier for lawyers to access finance at concessionary rates for their capital expenditure and working capital purposes. The Project Exchequer team recently commenced discussions in this respect, and we will provide progress reports in due course.
- (h) **Project Engine Room** - through this project, we are working on a system that will allow for the running of the NBA National Secretariat in a more professional, customer-friendly, and efficient manner that will ensure that certain administrative matters are left to competent career NBA staff with the elected national officers focusing on broader policy issues.

These are by no means the only projects or activities that we are working on. However, we believe that they signify a commitment to the actualisation of our core mandate of making the Bar work for its members and the society.

8. **Working Visits:** During the period under review, I embarked on a 3-day working visit to Jos, Plateau State in the course of which I participated in activities marking the Law Week of the NBA Jos Branch, and held an interactive session with Legal Practitioners in the State. I also paid a visit to the Chief Judge of the State to discuss ways of improving justice administration within the State and visited the #ENDSARS Judicial Panel of Inquiry in Plateau State to observe the proceedings first-hand.

I also attended the quarterly meeting of the Eastern Bar Forum (EBF) during which I promised that the leadership of the NBA will continue to enthrone inclusiveness in the NBA, while fulfilling its mandate to members of the NBA and the larger society. I also attended the Law Week of NBA Ibadan branch during the period. The essence of the sessions was to get feedback directly from the members on how the Bar can work for them in their respective branches, while taking into cognizance, the peculiarities of each jurisdiction.

9. **Security and Safety of Lawyers:** The security situation around the country is still worrisome. In the period under review, a lawyer was kidnapped in Taraba State, the spouse of another colleague kidnapped in Benue State and another colleague and her husband kidnapped in Edo State. The NBA, working with the relevant security agencies, intervened in all three cases and thankfully they were released unharmed.
10. **Updates from Troubled Branches** – I am pleased to report that we have resolved the imbroglio that engulfed the Ikeja branch of the NBA for several years. Under the leadership of Seni Adio, SAN (whom my administration appointed in September 2020 to lead a Caretaker Committee), the branch held successful elections in the first half of December 2020 and the elected officials have been sworn in.

I held a meeting with the caretaker committee of the Abeokuta branch of the NBA to discuss their challenges and plans towards resolving their issues as soon as possible.

The Abuja, Dutse, Katsina and Oyo branches of the NBA have been involved in different degrees of leadership and related crisis. For Oyo and Katsina, we are in the process of setting up caretaker committees to manage their affairs, while for Abuja and Dutse, we are setting up fact-finding teams to provide the National Secretariat with a detailed report that will enable my team and I to intervene appropriately.

11. **Speaking Engagements, Statutory Meetings, and Public Appearances:** During the period, (i) I was at the **Special Session of the Supreme Court** on 14 December 2020 to mark the opening of the 2021 Legal Year at which 72 (seventy-two) of our eminent colleagues were conferred with the distinguished rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria. At the event, I urged the Legal Practitioners Privileges Committee under the leadership of the Chief Justice of Nigeria to reconsider the criteria for conferment of the rank, noting that the present requirements are susceptible to irregularities, manipulation, policy

somersaults and inconsistencies; (ii) I attended a meeting of the **Body of Benchers** at which critical decisions were taken around the amendment of the Legal Practitioners Act, the changes to the Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Committee Rules and the criteria for admitting students of the National Open University of Nigeria into the Nigerian Law School; (iii) I attended a meeting of the **Council of Legal Education** to discuss, *inter alia*, online training and possible resumption date for the students of the Nigerian Law School; (iv) I attended a meeting of the **National Judicial Council (“NJC”)** on appointment of new judges and the extension of the tenure of the Acting Chief Judge of Gombe State. On behalf of the NBA, I strenuously objected to the extension on the ground that it was unconstitutional; (v) I attended a meeting of the **NJC Technology Committee** where electronic filing of processes across our courts was top on the agenda; (vi) I was a guest speaker at the **National Judicial Institute** on the subject of curbing corruption in the judiciary which for me was topical given recent reports around the magnitude of corruption in the judiciary; (vii) I was a guest speaker at the **Court of Appeal Justices Conference** in Lagos at which I called for more divisions of the court, better welfare for the Justices, infusion of technology into the system, and very importantly, better cohesion in the court to avoid conflicting judgments; and (viii) I was a keynote speaker at the event organised by the Lagos branch of NBA to mark the **72nd International Humans Rights Day** where I addressed issues arising from the #ENDSARS movement, the Lekki Massacre, other forms of human rights violations across the country and the impact of COVID-19 on human rights. In keeping with our motto of “*Promoting the Rule of Law*” the NBA under my watch is not relenting in its quest to ensure that it remains the leading watch-dog organisation in Nigeria.

12. **Miscellany:** I also wish to further report as follows (i) the feedback that I have received from various lawyers is that the CAC is still not functioning optimally. The Registrar-General has assured us that all steps are being taken to significantly improve the service experience. The Task Force on the Ease of Doing Business at the CAC set up by my administration has now released a communique outlining the steps that have been taken, key agreements that have been reached with the CAC and next steps. The expectation is that the CAC will begin to implement these steps and the NBA will continue to monitor the process to ensure that results are achieved; (ii) the Court of Appeal Rules are currently being reviewed. The NBA has reviewed and sent in its comments addressing, among others, the better functioning of the court and ease of interface with legal practitioners. Special thanks to the Chairman of the NBA Section on Legal Practice and his team for their support on this; and (iii) we recently learnt about the purported appointment of 40 magistrates by the Federal Capital Territory Judiciary. We are investigating this at the NBA and will provide an update in due course.

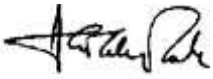
13. **My Heart Bleeds:** A number of lawyers and judicial officers in Nigeria either passed on, or were buried, during the period under review. Three of such sad events particularly stand out for me: (i) the demise of **Ms. Sylvia Nneka Okonkwo**, a young lawyer who until her death was a member of the Abuja branch. I made out time to attend the Service of Songs organised in her honour and was saddened to learn about the circumstances of her sudden demise; (b) the death of **Mr. Moses Idam**, a member of the Makurdi branch of the NBA who was gruesomely murdered in cold blood alongside his wife at their residence. The NBA is working with the authorities to ensure that the perpetrators of the

heinous act are apprehended and brought to book; and (c) most recently was the painful exit of **Pa Emmanuel Abiodun**, a foremost lawyer and patron of NBA Ibadan branch whom many refer to as the "*Encyclopaedia of the Bar*". Pa Abiodun lived a worthy and exemplary life, and I could not miss the opportunity to visit his home at Ibadan to pay my respects and commiserate with his family.

14. Raise the Bar With Me: As we continue to formulate and implement different policies for the Bar and the legal profession, if you have any brilliant ideas on how we can together raise the Bar and make it better for you, please send me an email at nbapresident@nigerianbar.org.ng and be assured that my team and I will give it the attention that it deserves.

I thank you again for your faith in, and mandate to, us. Please be assured that I remain committed to delivering on your mandate and bequeathing a Bar that you will be most proud of. I wish you a Happy New Year in advance.

Sincerely,



OLUMIDE AKPATA
President

