



SHAPING THE FUTURE, TOGETHER

Ikechukwu Uwanna's Programme of Action
for the Lagos Branch of the Nigerian Bar Association ("NBA")

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Distinguished Senior Colleagues and my Learned Friends,

BRIEF BACKGROUND

In recognition of the need to consolidate on the laudable achievements of recent administrations of the Lagos Branch of the Nigerian Bar Association (the “Premier Bar” or “Lagos Branch”) ; and in a bid to further contribute my quota in shaping the future of the Lagos Branch and indeed our profession as a whole ; after several months of consultations, I, Ikechukwu Uwanna, hereby humbly present myself as a candidate for the office of the Chairman of the Lagos Branch in the forthcoming Lagos Branch elections scheduled for the 28th of June, 2021.

In presenting myself for this office, may I mention that I have fulfilled all the eligibility requirements for this position as contained in the NBA Constitution 2015 (as amended) (“NBA Constitution”) and other relevant Bye Laws.

Called to the Nigerian Bar in 2003, I am a full member of the Lagos Branch, in good financial standing with same. I have also served the Lagos Branch and the NBA in general in different capacities in my over 17 years of practice, including serving as the Pioneer Secretary of the Young Lawyer’s Forum of the NBA (2007-2011) and Secretary of the Lagos Branch (2017-2019), to mention but a few. Above all, I have been cleared without any hitch by the Branch Electoral Committee to contest for this office.

MY CORE AGENDA FOR THE BRANCH



...direct the Lagos Branch to be even more functional in the service of the members and the general public.



As you all know, the NBA was established to (among others) bring the benefits of its membership closer to its members and to contribute to the actualisation of the NBA's aims and objectives as stipulated in section 3 of the NBA Constitution. There is little doubt that the Lagos Branch has been at the forefront of actualising these aims and objectives. What is also incontrovertible is that I have, especially in the last five years, been integral to the successes of the Lagos Branch. However, I believe that there is room for improvement and innovation.

Accordingly, my core agenda for the Lagos Branch is to deploy my unique wealth of experience in the service of the NBA, consolidate on previous successes, lead the way in shaping the future of the Lagos Branch, and direct the Lagos Branch to be even more functional in the service of the members and the general public.



VISION

My vision for the Lagos Branch - Shaping the Future, together.



MISSION

My mission for the Lagos Branch – To Consolidate and improve on all the achievements of its past administrations; lead the way in shaping its future and direct it to be more functional in the service of its members and the society at large.



STRATEGY

I have translated the above vision and mission into a manifesto and will proceed below to talk you through same in detail, in accordance with the sequence of matters arising and areas of focus.



The NBA Lagos Bar Centre

It is no longer news that the Lagos Branch has embarked on the project of erecting a befitting Bar Centre - a four-level commercial building, planned on a 1099.99 sqm. property. The Bar Centre, which will house an auditorium-sized conference hall with 1000 seating capacity and several committee rooms and two optional en-suite rooms for paying guests, has been a major dream for the Lagos Branch.

The concept of the Bar Centre is to provide enabling infrastructural facilities to allow for flexibility of work, as the current place of convergence for different meetings can no longer meet the expectations.

While the aim of the infrastructure is to cover for modernized workspace and aid productivity, it will also ensure the fragmented pieces of the Association are brought together to deliver excellence per time and life cycle of the body. Recent and the current administrations of the Lagos Branch deserve huge applause for the current stage of progress of the Bar Centre project. However, it is my mission to attain a remarkable milestone in completing this project.

I am committed to ensuring that the incoming administration embarks on a comprehensive review of the state of the project; resolve all pending issues and tackle any challenges to enable us to deliver the Bar Centre within the next twenty-four months.





Welfare of Lagos Branch Members

My administration will strive to ensure that members of the Lagos Branch enjoy improved access to healthcare under a workable insurance scheme.

Health Insurance at a Reduced Cost

There is no gainsaying that in every profession, (including the legal profession) the issue of health/risk exposure of members is paramount. Therefore, there is a need to improve on the existing Health Insurance scheme and provide a more affordable Health Insurance for members of the Lagos Branch.

My key priority is to deliver on this – and thankfully, the NBA National body is arranging to provide same. We shall collaborate with the NBA National body to ensure that this objective is achieved.

Establishing a “Lawyer’s Emergency Rehabilitation Fund”

It is no longer news that the Covid-19 Pandemic (the “pandemic”), aftermath of the EndSars protests as well as the JUSUN Strike, to mention but a few, have posed unprecedented challenges to the socio political and economic activities in Nigeria. Indeed, these events have affected all Nigerians and the legal profession generally, with significant impact on the daily professional practice of lawyers. Thus, it has become necessary for different professional and non-professional bodies to act and initiate recovery plans for their members.



Welfare of Lagos Branch Members (cont'd)

Consistent with its premier status in the NBA, the Lagos Branch took several steps towards assisting lawyers, especially young lawyers to quickly recover and bounce back, despite the unexpected nature of the challenges. Beyond that, it is now necessary to institutionalise such recovery efforts and also plan for such eventualities in the future. It is for this reason that my administration will propose the establishment of a Lawyer's Emergency Rehabilitation Fund that will ensure that the Lagos Branch is better prepared in future to assist its members during tough times.

Exploring Strategic Partnerships for Covid-19 Vaccination for Lawyers

My administration will seek partnerships with the relevant bodies in Lagos State to ensure that lawyers, who are interested, receive Covid-19 vaccines. We shall also play our part towards orientating members of the Lagos Branch about the need to receive their Covid-19 vaccines. In my view, this is one of the ways to facilitate the gradual return to normalcy and ensure that the legal system in Nigeria returns to its critical role of delivering justice to the Nigerian populace.

Promotion of Sporting and Recreational Activities

My administration shall aim at instituting and encouraging sporting activities to keep our members healthy. This is very important as there is a rising tide in the number of health-related crisis amongst lawyers as a result of our sedentary lifestyle.



Capacity Development Programmes

Knowledge Sharing Sessions

If there is one thing that the Premier Bar has become widely acknowledged for especially in the last five years, it is being at the forefront of fulfilling the NBA's objectives of the promotion and advancement of legal and continuing legal education in Nigeria through its Knowledge Sharing activities during the Lagos Branch meetings, conferences, seminars, webinars and specialized training, as well as in other fora. Needless to say, the impact has been far reaching and members of the Lagos Branch have benefited so much from the supply of new knowledge and exposure to technical trainings which they might have otherwise been unable to access.

We shall continue with this practice at our monthly meetings and other events and ensure that the topics are more curated to suit our members' professional needs.

Workshops on Soft Skills

My administration shall take the capacity development programmes a notch higher by introducing workshops and trainings for our members on soft skills. This is to ensure continuous growth and advancement of interpersonal skills that eventually have a toned-up effect on the execution of the hard skills aspect of the profession. A lawyer who does not have people skills will mostly mismanage any instruction or brief he receives, irrespective of how technically sound he is. Hence, it is important to pay attention to several skill-oriented areas that are directly tied to Law practice but have hitherto, not been accorded due attention.

In this regard, we shall be engaging experts with a view to delivering impactful soft skill programmes to members, specifically designed to suit the demands of the profession.



Capacity Development Programmes (cont'd)

Bar Journal

Having served as a member of the NBA Editorial Committee, at the National level, I have been exposed to the importance of Bar Journals and I am passionate about same. I intend to establish an editorial committee which would be saddled with the responsibility of producing a Bar Journal for the Lagos Branch. The Bar Journal will encourage scholarship because members' articles would be published, and they will be afforded literature on contemporary legal issues.





Young Lawyers

In accordance with the relevant provision of the Byelaws for Sections, Institutes and Fora contained in the Schedule to the NBA Constitution and the spirit of the Constitution, it is my pledge to organise an election of the Executive Committee members of the Young Lawyers Forum (YLF). In this regard, I will work with the YLF leadership to initiate additional developmental and capacity building programmes, set timelines and provide relevant resources for the YLF to achieve its set objectives.

This has become necessary in view of the central role young lawyers play in the legal profession and the Country at large.

My administration will provide necessary guidance and support to ensure that the YLF Committee initiate policies and programmes that will transform the lives of young lawyers and change our profession for good.

Enhanced Remuneration for Young Lawyers

The issue of poor remuneration that “Young Lawyers” generally receive, especially at the beginning of their careers, is a very hot topic. Needless to say, there are certain things we may not be able to control in this regard, but the things within our internal circles are always controllable. Therefore, as members of the Lagos Branch, we should be able to commit to, and follow through with a resolve to enhance the remuneration of our young lawyers. This includes basic salary and career mapping training that can compensate for the low salaries being paid to young lawyers, particularly in light of the current economic situation in the country.



Young Lawyers

There is already a Remuneration Committee established by the Lagos Branch to devise workable ways to solve this long running conundrum of lawyers' inadequate remuneration. I am also aware that the NBA National body has established a similar committee. My administration will work with these Committees to strategically identify areas to enhance the quality of job experience within the industry which will, in turn, make sure Young Lawyers enjoy the benefit(s) of being lawyers right from the inception of their career.

New Wigs Induction and Placement Programme

Each year, we have about five thousand lawyers who are churned out by the Nigerian Law School. About 50% of these new wigs end up in Lagos.

We need a structured induction and placement programme to welcome and assimilate them into the Lagos Branch.

We commit to holding an Induction and Placement programme to familiarise the new wigs with the programme, activities, and law firms within Lagos and how they can maximise the opportunities available to them.

This is crucial to the future periodic transitioning phase of the body as a whole. The priority of a young lawyer is to settle with the body and thrive exceptionally and we shall help them to achieve same.





Young Lawyers

Mentorship Programme

We will continue with, and improve on the group mentorship events of the Lagos Branch. In particular, we will continue with the 1-1 mentorship initiative through which young lawyers were paired with over 120 leading lawyers across 4 (four) continents while I served as the Secretary of the Lagos Branch. We will involve corporate practitioners (the in-house lawyers) and public sector practitioners (government officials) with a view to creating more effective knowledge exchange platforms and to enlighten members on career opportunities in those sectors of legal practice. We will also incorporate an effective monitoring and feedback system to ensure that these initiatives deliver the outcomes envisaged at their inception and where necessary, make adjustments so that the initiatives remain fit for the purpose and serve the needs of members.

Law Firm Mentorship Initiative

As the current Secretary of the NBA, Section on Business Law, Law Firm Practice Management Committee (“LFPM Committee”), will partner with the LFPM Committee to provide a template for Law Firms in Lagos to build and grow well structured and competitive law firms.

Also, we will encourage the more established firms to provide law office management and structuring guidance to start-up law firms and others that may need the service. The initiative will involve the established law firm’s representative reviewing the systems and processes of the upcoming firm and providing necessary insights. The upcoming firm will also have an opportunity to shadow the established firm and participate in some of its non-confidential activities. This initiative should create relationships, expand networks and promote collaboration amongst members of the Lagos Branch.



More Efficient Management of the Lagos Branch

The Secretariat

Once elected and in conjunction with the in-coming Secretary, we shall conduct an audit of the Secretariat to find ways we can rejig it to be more customer-centric in a manner that will engender ease of interaction between members, the organs of the Lagos Branch and the NBA National body, as necessary.

We shall also deploy technology to ensure that the Secretariat is more efficient and effective in its service delivery.

Enhanced Data Mining and Management

My administration will consolidate on current efforts of the present administration in this area by harmonising and maintaining a comprehensive database of all Lagos Branch members for easy accessibility by lawyers and the general public, as this will no doubt build the much-needed public confidence and bring lawyers closer to prospective clients at a click of a button.

Committees

To aid the work of the executive committee of my administration, we will immediately set up statutory and other committees populated by carefully selected members of the Lagos Branch with requisite experience and exposure regarding the respective committee's scope of influence, to deliver value to members.

We shall also create some new committees which will include the following;



More Efficient Management of the Lagos Branch (cont'd)

- The Advisory Committee

To further actualise my mission for the Lagos Branch, in recognition of the need for wise counsel, and in order to explore the opportunities that come with preparation, I aim to set up an advisory board to cut across all focal point(s) of the Lagos Branch as provided for in the NBA Constitution.

The advisory body will serve to advise and scrutinise our policies and programmes to ensure that they are of maximum interest and benefit to members of the Lagos Branch.

- Public Interest Committee

In a bid to serve justice and maintain a sustainable judicial ecosystem, I will inaugurate, with defining roles, a Public Interest Committee ("PI Committee") to ensure that the NBA serves and delivers on its duties of protecting the public and re-aligning the professional body activities and practice with the sole objective of ensuring justice for all.

This PI Committee will report its public interest activities and its strategy to ensure that public interest issues are resolved in a satisfactory manner, during each monthly meeting of the Lagos Branch.





Bar – Bench Relationship

It has been acknowledged overtime that the level of engagement of the Judiciary, within and without the purview of its executive government is not just essential but commensurate to how much justice could be gotten from such a government and judicial system.

In keeping with the NBA's objective of promoting the Rule of Law, it has become expedient for the NBA, particularly at the Branch level to continuously engage with the Bench which ultimately serves as the hope of the common man, with the aim of finding solutions to the problems bedevilling the society, by providing effective justice administration system.

Through the existing framework, my administration will improve upon our relationship with the judiciary in Lagos State with a view to solving the problems militating against access to and administration of justice in the State by engaging stakeholders as well as implementing pertinent policies.

We shall also revive the Justice J. I. C. Taylor Memorial Lecture which over the years has been a programme that created a platform for the engagement of the Judiciary to provide solutions to the many issues plaguing both sides of the divide.



Law Reform Measures

In the past, the Lagos State legislature enacted laws with little or no contribution from the Lagos Branch. Most of these laws, no doubt, have far-reaching effects on us both as individuals and as legal practitioners. This trend can no longer continue as the role of the NBA in the law-making process cannot be overemphasized.

Accordingly, my administration will engage relevant authorities in the state, particularly the State Legislature to ensure the inclusion of the NBA in the law-making process such that only people-oriented Laws are enacted and with relevant input from the NBA and its members.





Synergy With Government Agencies

We shall interface with governmental agencies such as the Police Force, LASTMA, the EFCC, the Lands Registry, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Corporate Affairs Commission, and any other agency with whom members of the Lagos Branch habitually interact with, to deliver results for clients with ease. Continuous dialogue with such agencies would partly focus on the relationship between our members and officers of the agencies.



Synergy With NBA National Body

While the Lagos Branch is undoubtedly the leading Branch in the country, it is nonetheless only 1 out of 125 NBA Branches in the country. To ensure that the programmes and schemes of the NBA are better felt by the members of the Lagos Branch, we will pursue greater synergy with the national secretariat of the NBA. We have the privilege of having produced the last two consecutive Presidents of the NBA. We must ensure that this translates into meaningful benefits for our Branch.



Final Words

It has been my pleasure to present this manifesto as a summary of my intentions towards you and towards the Lagos Branch. I believe in the saying that “leadership never comes with ease in responsibility, but with burdens with which the body being “led” has been enabled to strive and excel.” My stance on “leadership” is “service to and for humanity”.

It is also commonly said that to conquer a mountain, you need a heart, hands, and dreams. I agree with the need for a heart, as I love the Lagos Branch undyingly and I know you all do as well and want to see that we thrive excellently as a body. With our hearts put together, our hands on deck pushing daily and deliberately towards our dreams, we will conquer.

The NBA is not just an Association I belong to; it is my HISTORY. A place I grew and was nurtured. Friends, I have not sprung from the backstreet of nothingness to vie for the post of Chairman. I have a proven track record of several multi-functionalities in top executive platforms. With your electoral votes (in my favour), I will translate my vision for the Lagos Branch and extend it to our collective statement of pride. I will focus the Premier Bar on real-world issues and then, we can shape our future, together.

Ikechukwu Uwanna

June 2021

