



# TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP AND A FEARLESS BAR THE MANIFESTO

A close-up portrait of Chukwuka Ikwuazom, a man with a short beard and mustache, wearing a dark pinstriped suit jacket, a white shirt, and a patterned tie. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a serious expression. The background is a dark, textured green.

This is **MY MANIFESTO** on which I am running for Election for the Office of President of the Nigerian Bar Association

**Chukwuka Ikwuazom, SAN, FCTI**

*At the core of my manifesto lie two fundamental ideologies - **TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP and A FEARLESS BAR.** I am convinced that by embracing these ideologies, we can collectively "Unleash Innovation, Cultivate Resilience, and Fearlessly Champion Justice."*



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# INTRODUCTION

1. I, Chukwuka Ikwuazom, SAN, FCTI am, honoured to announce my candidacy for the esteemed position of President of the Nigerian Bar Association (the "NBA" or the "Association"). With the elections scheduled to take place on 20 July 2024, I present to you my manifesto outlining my vision, aspirations, and plans for the NBA.
2. I received my LL.B degree from the University of Nigeria in 2000 and was called to the Nigerian Bar in May 2002. This marked the commencement of a diverse legal journey encompassing both national and international landscapes. In pursuit of professional excellence and expertise, I gained admission to Columbia University, New York, where I earned an LLM in 2009. Notably, I was honoured with the Harlan Fiske Stone Prize for academic excellence and awarded the Judith R. and Michael E. Thoyer scholarship during my time at Columbia.
3. Admitted to both the Nigerian and New York State Bars, my expertise spans diverse practice areas, including taxation, energy, intellectual property, finance, and banking. I have litigated landmark cases and advised on complex commercial transactions. I am a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Taxation of Nigeria (FCTI) with demonstrable expertise in taxation.
4. Currently, I am a Partner in the Dispute Resolution and Tax (DRT) practice of my firm, Aluko & Oyebode, where I have the honour of leading the Taxation Practice. My professional journey is characterised by an unwavering dedication to excellence and integrity. Any plaudits are as a result.
5. In 2020, I was elevated to the coveted rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), a significant milestone that underscores my contributions to the evolution of the law. This achievement reflects my dedication to impassioned courtroom advocacy and my commitment to advancing the legal profession.
6. I have always been passionate about the advancement of the NBA and the reform of the legal profession to better serve the needs of its members and the society. In furtherance of that passion, I have actively served in diverse roles within the NBA – at the national and branch levels and have been an active member of various sections of the NBA.



7. As a member of the NBA Section on Business Law (NBA-SBL), I diligently served as Vice-Chairman of its Employment and Industrial Relations Committee for two terms. I was a member of the Technical Committee on Conference Planning for the NBA Annual General Conferences in 2019 and 2020 and the Chairman of the Local Organizing Committee for the 2019 Conference, held in Lagos, thereby contributing to the successes of these conferences.
8. In 2017, I was elected Chairman of the NBA Lagos Branch (the "Premier Bar"). As Chairman, I pioneered several transformative policies and practices that redefined leadership at the Branch. I initiated knowledge-sharing sessions at Branch meetings which provided a major incentive for Branch members to attend monthly meetings. This significantly increased meeting attendance from an average of 250 to nearly 1000. The increase prompted a move to a larger venue to accommodate the burgeoning participation of members at the monthly meetings.
9. In addition to the knowledge-sharing sessions, our administration introduced individual and group mentorship programmes under which seasoned and accomplished lawyers shared their experiences with and provided mentorship to younger members of the Branch. These mentorship programs significantly enhanced professional growth and cohesion among members.
10. As a firm believer in capacity building and continuing professional development for lawyers, I reconstituted the Continuing Legal Education (CLE) Committee of the NBA Lagos Branch and provided the necessary leadership and direction for the Committee to deliver free and regular professional training and seminars to members. It is noteworthy and heartening that this innovation has become a staple food across the NBA and its branches, nationwide.
11. My administration institutionalised financial accountability and transparency at the Lagos Branch by providing detailed, easily understandable, and scrutable monthly financial reports to Branch members. These extremely successful policies and initiatives have since become a cornerstone of ethical governance within the Branch. They were adopted by my successors and have since become part of the leadership culture of the NBA Lagos Branch and as models for other Branches.



12. As Chairman, my administration commenced the building project for the construction of a befitting Bar Centre for the NBA Lagos Branch and left a significant sum in the project account for my successors to continue with the project. Currently, I serve as the Chairman of the Building Committee of the NBA Lagos Branch, and in that role, I am working tirelessly with other members to ensure completion of the project.
13. At the national level, I served as a member of the National Executive Council of the NBA ("NEC") from 2017 to 2021 and was reappointed for a two-year term, set to end in August 2024.
14. I also currently serve as the Chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association Securities Agencies Relations Committee ("NBA-SARC"). In this role, my team and I have consistently 'advocated for lawyers who have faced various forms of victimization or harassment by security agencies while representing their clients. Our efforts also focus on promoting cooperation between lawyers and security agencies in Nigeria to minimize incidences of security agents impeding the rights of lawyers to deliver legal services effectively to their clients.
15. In recognition of my notable contributions to the Bar, I was honoured with a distinguished service award by the NBA Lagos Branch during its 2023 Annual Dinner and Award Night.
16. This manifesto is not merely a proclamation of intent. It is my solemn commitment to you as a member of the NBA, a votive offering of the exacting standard to which you must hold, and by which you must judge me, should I, by God's grace and your choosing, become your President.



# MY PHILOSOPHY

## – UNITY & CONTINUITY

1. My vision is for transformative leadership and a fearless Bar. But this cannot be achieved without a unified front. The legal profession is marked by profound polarization, evident in the divisions between the Bar and the Bench, the Outer Bar and the Inner Bar, Young Lawyers and Senior Lawyers, Litigators/Advocates and Commercial/Transactional Lawyers, Government Lawyers and Private Practitioners, In-House Counsel and Private Practitioners, the Academic Bar and the wider NBA, as well as along ethnic or religious lines within both the Bar and the Bench.
2. On the surface, these divisions may be dismissed as inconsequential, but they are a pernicious plague on the legal profession and hamper the realization of our collective goals. A house divided against itself cannot stand. Therefore, we must forge unity within the legal profession. Recognizing and bridging these divisions is essential to revitalizing our profession and the justice sector.
3. I would love to see better continuity in the ideals and policies of our Association. As thought leaders in politics and governance, the legal profession should pioneer admirable principles like continuity, away from the norm in our larger polity. I am, therefore, committed to continuity in leadership. As a President, I will take on and advance the invaluable initiatives and policies of past NBA presidents. I hope to build upon their efforts, particularly in areas such as legal regulatory reform and the promotion of transparency and financial prudence within the NBA.
4. If elected President, I aim to instil a culture of sustained progress, ensuring that future leaders follow suit in advancing our profession's interests. Through unity, continuity, and strategic action, I will steer the NBA towards a brighter future.



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# PRIORITY AIMS & OBJECTS

1. If elected President of the NBA, my core focus will center around the aims and objectives outlined in Article 3 (1), (13), (12), (3), and (6) of the NBA Constitution 2015 (as amended in 2021) (the “NBA Constitution”).

In order of priority, the following are the aims and objectives I will concentrate on:

- 1.1. Maintenance and defence of the integrity and independence of the Bar and the Judiciary in Nigeria.
  - 1.2. Establishment of schemes for the promotion of the welfare, security, and economic advancement of members of the profession.
  - 1.3. Creation of schemes for the empowerment of newly qualified members and members with disabilities, and for the provision of assistance to aged or incapacitated members of the Association.
  - 1.4. Improvement of the system of administration of justice, its procedures, and the arrangement of court business and regular law reporting.
  - 1.5. Maintenance of the highest standard of professional conduct, etiquette and discipline.
2. My decision to prioritize these aims and objectives does not diminish the significance of the other objectives. Rather, it reflects my belief that focusing on specific areas is essential for achieving impactful outcomes. By prioritizing objectives directly related to the unity and welfare of our members and the integrity of the legal profession, I aim to address pressing issues and make meaningful strides towards advancing the interests of our Association and its members.
3. It is undeniable that many of our members feel disconnected from the NBA, viewing membership as obligatory rather than voluntary. This perception must change, and I pledge to undertake this task. Acknowledging the diversity of needs and aspirations within the NBA, the NBA must actively strive to be relevant to all members. By doing so, we would not only foster unity across the divisions earlier highlighted in paragraph B (1) of this manifesto, but will position the NBA and empower its members to effectively carry out our role in society.



# SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES

## WELFARE

- 1.1. The welfare of legal professionals, particularly young lawyers, is of utmost priority for me. It is my fervent belief that the welfare of legal professionals is intricately connected with their dignity and the level of respect accorded them by members of the public.
- 1.2. Hence, as President, I will spearhead a series of meticulously crafted policies aimed at elevating the welfare of legal professionals. I will establish a holistic approach to addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by new wigs and other young lawyers, private practitioners, in-house lawyers, lawyers employed in the public sector, law lecturers, and judges.
- 1.3. Below, I set out my ideas for a robust framework aimed at safeguarding the livelihood of legal professionals.

## THE JUDICIARY

- 1.4. I believe that improvement of remuneration, working conditions, and post-service entitlements for judicial officers in Nigeria is indispensable to a well-functioning Judiciary which is fundamental to the stability and progress of any civilized nation. As watchdogs of society, it is imperative that the NBA leadership prioritizes this cause. This I intend to do.
- 1.5. Poor welfare of judicial officers and unconducive working conditions in the Judiciary undermine both the quality and efficiency of the justice system and erode public trust in the administration of justice. An improved remuneration and welfare scheme for the Judiciary will directly impact the quality of justice delivery and will make it more attractive to talented legal professionals. This, in turn, will ensure that the Judiciary is staffed with the best and brightest minds, capable of upholding the principles of justice with integrity and competently discharging their functions.
- 1.6. By championing the enhancement of the Judiciary's welfare and ensuring the appointment and retention of judges based on integrity, competence, and capacity, the NBA will contribute to a stronger, more resilient legal system.





# SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES

1.7. Indeed, it is in our enlightened self-interest as legal professionals to advocate for a dignified Judiciary. Should I be elected the NBA President, I will vigorously collaborate with all relevant stakeholders, including the Attorney-General of the Federation and the Attorneys-General of the States, our professional colleagues in the legislative and executive arms of government at the federal and state levels, and the Bench towards the enactment and implementation of legislative and administrative frameworks to guarantee adequate compensation of judicial officers and improvement of their working conditions.

## THE BAR

1.8. My aspiration to be NBA President is driven by a deep commitment to enhance the livelihood of our members. I recognise the groundbreaking efforts of the administrations of Mr. Olumide Akpata and Mr. Yakubu Chonoko Maikyau, SAN, OON which led to the enactment of the Legal Practitioners Remuneration (for Business, Legal Service, and Representation) Order, 2023 (the "Remuneration Order").

1.9. If properly implemented, the Remuneration Order will guarantee to lawyers, fair remuneration for legal services that will ultimately ensure financial security to many of our members. I will therefore rigorously pursue the implementation of the Remuneration Order in collaboration with the Branches through the Remuneration Committee. To this end, I will actively engage with all Branch Chairmen to set up Remuneration Taskforces in their Branches to monitor compliance with the Remuneration Order, as a first step. I will also initiate, through the Remuneration Committee and in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, an implementation mechanism to encourage voluntary compliance, and to ensure that violations of the Remuneration Order are decisively addressed through the appropriate disciplinary channels in the profession.

1.10. One of the measures I will initiate to ensure compliance with the Remuneration Order is to introduce a special seal to be affixed on all land documents prepared by legal practitioners. I will actively collaborate with the Attorneys-General of the States to introduce administrative measures that will make the proposed seal on land documents compulsory, such that the affixion of the seal will be a condition for registration of all land documents prepared by legal practitioners.

1.11. The Branches will be responsible for the administration and issuance of the seal under a framework that will be developed in collaboration with the Branches. The essence of the seal will be to validate land documents prepared by legal practitioners and it will be



# SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES

Issued only upon demonstration by a legal practitioner that the professional fees for a land transaction complied with the prescribed scale of fees.

- 1.12. I will adopt a protective stance towards the business of law and safeguarding its integrity. This will entail implementing models to enforce the values entrenched in the Rules of Professional Conduct ("RPC"). I however acknowledge that some of the rules in the RPC are no longer fit for purpose and I will work towards a guided reform of the RPC that will retain its core principles and values that are necessary to safeguard the integrity of the profession while eliminating those that no longer align with the evolving landscape for legal services.
- 1.13. Provisions of the RPC such as Rule 3, which seek to safeguard the legal profession from encroachment by non-lawyers will be strictly enforced, while rules like Rule 22, which limit lawyers from visiting clients at their premises to receive legal instructions will be amended to better accommodate the changing dynamics of legal practice.
- 1.14. For the Bar, my presidency will be characterized by proactive advocacy, strategic reforms, and collaborative engagement to uphold the dignity and economic viability of legal practice in Nigeria. Together, we will create a conducive environment where every legal professional thrives and our collective aspirations for a robust legal sector are realized.

## REMUNERATION

- 1.15. If elected President of the NBA, I plan to seriously address the pressing issue of remuneration of lawyers in employment. To this end, I will collaborate with all relevant stakeholders to implement the Remuneration Report which was adopted by the National Executive Council in 2022, using the data from the remuneration survey that was also commissioned by the Remuneration Committee in 2022.
- 1.16. The NBA under my leadership will collaborate with the Branches and other stakeholders to ensure that compliance with the remuneration standards prescribed by the NBA becomes a prerequisite for professional certification processes, including the issuance of letters of good standing, applications for notary public appointments, and endorsement of lawyers seeking elevation to the Bench, and the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria.



# SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES

- 1.17. To encourage voluntary compliance by law firms with the prescribed remuneration standards, I will set up a mechanism under which the names of compliant law firms will be published and regularly updated on the NBA website and published at NBA events.
- 1.18. As a Partner in a firm with one of the best remuneration systems for new wigs, I have personally been part of collective efforts to ensure adequate remuneration for new wigs and will encourage the implementation of some of the models at Aluko & Oyeboode by other law firms should I emerge the NBA President.
- 1.19. By embracing transparency, accountability, and market incentives, we can usher in a new era of fairness and prosperity within the legal profession, ensuring that every legal practitioner is valued and compensated equitably.

## CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

- 1.20. In addition to the remuneration of lawyers in private employment, the NBA under my leadership will also pay close attention to the remuneration of lawyers employed in the public sector. I will collaborate with relevant agencies of government, the Attorney-General of the Federation, and the Attorneys-General of the States to address the issue of salary disparity between lawyers and other professionals and other practices that adversely affect the interests of lawyers employed in the public sector.
- 1.21. The dignity of our profession cannot be isolated from the welfare of its members. Part of my plan for protecting the welfare of legal professionals is advocacy for minimum conditions of service in lawyers' employment contracts. Lawyers in employment deserve basic protections and benefits, outlined in relevant legislation such as paid annual leave, health and insurance and pension contributions, where applicable, and I will set up mechanisms for ensuring the realisation of this goal.

## PAYMENT OF PRACTISING FEES

- 1.22. As I had stated earlier, while some provisions of the RPC are laudable and remain relevant in today's legal landscape, the burden of strict adherence to some of the provisions will be addressed under my administration should I emerge NBA President. For instance, Rule 9 of the RPC should be reviewed to admit an exception for lawyers admitted to the Bar shortly before the end of the year. It is unjust for newly enrolled lawyers to bear the burden of paying practising fees twice within a one-year timeframe. I will propose extending fee coverage for newly enrolled lawyers beyond the calendar year of



# SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES

their admission to the Bar to the succeeding year of their admission. This way, lawyers admitted to the Bar in November or December and who pay their practising fees shortly after their enrolment in the year of their enrolment should not be required to pay practising fees for the succeeding year.

- 1.23. Furthermore, it is imperative to highlight the importance of employers assuming the responsibility of paying practising fees and branch dues for their employees. Given that the payment of practising fees is integral to the employment of lawyers, it is only fitting for employers to shoulder the responsibility of paying these fees on behalf of the lawyers they employ. This measure aims to alleviate financial burdens on lawyers and foster a supportive environment for legal professionals within their respective workplaces.

## ADDRESSING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- 1.24. I acknowledge the persistence of complaints of sexual harassment in the legal profession, and I commit to working with relevant NBA sections and committees to address this issue. Drawing from global insights, my administration will devise strategies to combat harassment, with a focus on ensuring a safe and supportive environment for all legal professionals. Additionally, it is imperative to extend protection to law students and institutions of legal learning, ensuring they are shielded from sexual predators. This proactive approach will uphold the integrity and dignity of our profession while safeguarding the well-being of all individuals within the legal community.
- 1.25. The NBA must protect victims of sexual harassment and ensure swift and decisive action against offenders. To this end, my administration will encourage a culture of naming and shaming perpetrators.
- 1.26. I will pay particular attention to our female colleagues who without a doubt are more vulnerable to sexual harassment. By fostering an environment where unacceptable behaviour is met with unwavering condemnation and punishment by the profession, my administration will empower victims to step forward without fear of retribution. Through collaborative efforts with the NBA Women's Forum and other stakeholders, we will define clear boundaries of acceptable conduct, streamline reporting mechanisms, and provide robust support to victims, all underpinned by a commitment to uphold the integrity of our noble profession.



# SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES

1.27. Under my administration, the 2021 sexual harassment policy of the NBA will be vigorously enforced, and its provisions will be strictly applied to offenders. It is imperative that all lawyers are familiarized with the contents of the policy to ensure accountability and deterrence. Furthermore, we will implement mechanisms to protect female colleagues within the Bar who bravely come forward to report instances of harassment. Additionally, we will encourage confidential reporting channels for victims to report offenders discreetly. This proactive approach aims to create a safe and supportive environment within the legal profession, ensuring that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect.

## SUSTAINABLE TRAINING AND CAREER EMPOWERMENT

1.28. The journey of a legal professional extends far beyond the halls of the University and the Nigerian Law School. Recognizing this, I will initiate and implement comprehensive post-qualification training and career development programmes under the auspices of the NBA. As new lawyers step into the profession, the NBA will take charge of their induction, offering guidance on diverse career options and fostering awareness of the rich opportunities available within the legal landscape.

1.29. Through collaborative efforts with stakeholders, including large commercial firms and multinational organizations, we will host career fairs and facilitate job placements for new wigs. For those venturing into solo practice, structured training and mentorship schemes will be instituted, providing essential support, and laying the groundwork for success.

1.30. I intend to negotiate with financial institutions and secure preferential loans for lawyers seeking to set up law firms, thereby fostering innovation and bolstering the entrepreneurial spirit within the legal community.

1.31. Continuous learning and specialisation are close to my heart. Under my watch, the NBA will facilitate access to career-enhancing post-qualification trainings and certifications for new entrants into the profession. In particular, being a specialist in taxation myself, through concerted collaboration with institutions such as the Chartered Institute of Taxation, Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, UK, Chartered Institute of Secretaries and Administrators, I hope to see a new generation of legal practitioners, empowered to set out as experts in tax law and in other respective fields of specialisation.



# SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES

- 1.32. Furthermore, I am a firm believer in mentorship. Under my leadership as the Chairman of the NBA Lagos Branch, I set up group and individual mentoring programmes through which younger members of the Branch enjoyed the benefit of learning from experienced high-flying senior lawyers. If elected President of the NBA, I intend to, in partnership with stakeholders in the profession, advance continuous professional growth through mentorship and formal trainings.
- 1.33. Every member of the NBA, particularly young lawyers, will receive enhanced value for their membership of the NBA. Not anymore should we hear complaints that NBA membership demands obligations and extends no value. With tailored programmes and resources geared towards members' specific needs and aspirations, I aim to chart a path for more fulfilling involvement of lawyers in the NBA.
- 1.34. In addition to the comprehensive post-qualification training and career development programmes outlined above, I will propose the establishment of a pioneering Legal Wellness Programme. This initiative goes beyond traditional professional development by addressing the holistic well-being of legal professionals. The Legal Wellness Programme will offer resources and support tailored to the unique challenges faced by lawyers, including stress management workshops, mental health resources, and peer support networks. By prioritizing the mental, emotional, and physical wellness of our legal community, we can foster resilience, manage burnout, and cultivate a culture of support and camaraderie within the legal profession.
- 1.35. Through these innovative initiatives, I hope to ensure that legal professionals not only excel in their career but also thrive in all aspects of their lives.

## HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY

- 1.36. **Technological Integration:** Embracing the digital age, the NBA will leverage technology to streamline operations, enhance data management, and expand access to learning opportunities.
- 1.37. **Digital Empowerment:** Initiatives such as "Opportunities for Lawyers" and online training programmes will empower legal professionals, providing avenues for networking, skill development, and career advancement.
- 1.38. **Digital Seals:** The NBA under my leadership will introduce digital seals that can be electronically affixed on processes and documents.



# SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES

1.39. **Maximizing Potential:** Building on existing initiatives, my administration will explore new avenues to harness technology's full potential, ensuring that the NBA remains at the forefront of innovation and progress.

## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

1.40. If entrusted with the Presidency of the NBA, I am committed to expanding the horizons of the business of law, through focused and deliberate business development initiatives and limiting the encroachment by non-lawyers into the legal services market.

1.41. To realize this vision, I will embark on a multifaceted approach aimed at both empowering legal professionals and enlightening the public on the myriad ways they can benefit from legal expertise. Firstly, I will champion comprehensive training and guidance programmes tailored to equip lawyers with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in specialized areas of practice. This will involve forging strategic partnerships with industry leaders and educational institutions to offer innovative training modules and certifications.

1.42. Furthermore, through targeted outreach campaigns, educational seminars, and collaborative ventures with businesses and organizations, I will lead initiatives to raise public awareness about the diverse roles lawyers can play beyond traditional litigation and contract drafting. Not only will these concerted efforts expand the scope of legal services, but they will also foster stronger bonds between the community and legal practitioners.

## A STANDING AND MORE IMPACTFUL WELFARE SCHEME

1.43. In response to unforeseen challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation and depreciation of the Naira, the NBA under my leadership will establish a robust welfare scheme, providing vital support to the most vulnerable members of the Association.

1.44. To ensure sustainability, I propose funding the welfare scheme through strategic mechanisms, such as regular deductions from bar practising fees and other viable sources of income within the Association. This approach will guarantee the scheme's longevity and effectiveness during times of need, allowing us to provide continuous support to our members.



# SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES

- 1.45. To maintain accountability, I am committed to ensuring that only active members in good standing will be eligible to benefit from the programme. This emphasizes the significance of fulfilling responsibilities to the Association and strengthens our shared dedication to reciprocal assistance and unity.
- 1.46. Such a scheme will ensure that in future our members are insulated from the extreme impact of economic shocks.





# A FEARLESS BAR

- 2.1. The present situation in the country where impunity seems to have gained a subtle acceptance as the norm and the rule of law is undermined on a daily basis by government agencies and officials underscores the imperative for a FEARLESS BAR. The NBA is the last standing bulwark of the rule of law and the protection of the rights of members of the public. I therefore fully understand the need for the leadership of the NBA to decisively respond to and seek redress for breaches of the rule of law and the rights of vulnerable and defenceless members of the public.
- 2.2. If the NBA were to fail to decisively respond to abuse of power by public office holders and security agencies, public confidence would be eroded not only in the NBA but also the entire justice system. The defence of the rule of law and the rights of members of the Bar, the Bench and vulnerable members of the public against the excesses of public office holders and security agencies will be of top priority to the NBA under my leadership. In my role as Chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association Security Agencies Relations Committee, I have spoken out strongly against the wrongful conduct of security agencies and if I am elected President, I pledge to continue to speak truth to power without fear or favour and to restore the NBA to its original place as a bastion of the rule of law.

## JUSTICE SECTOR REFORM

- 3.1. TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP entails empowering legal practitioners to thrive in an environment conducive to justice and fairness. The NBA under my leadership will pave the way for a FEARLESS BAR. To achieve this, I will agitate for transformative reforms in our justice sector, embodying the spirit of fearless advocacy and visionary leadership.
- 3.2. A FEARLESS BAR demands bold actions in confronting the systemic inefficiencies plaguing our justice delivery system. By spearheading comprehensive reforms, I hope to see an NBA that will dismantle barriers hindering the legal profession's effectiveness and instil confidence both in practitioners and the public.
- 3.3. The inefficiencies within our judicial system have far-reaching consequences beyond the legal community. These inefficiencies create obstacles to conducting business smoothly in Nigeria and dissuade commercial entities from considering Nigeria as an investment destination. Even when Nigeria is chosen as an investment destination, the inefficiencies affect the choice of Nigerian law as the governing law for contractual agreements. This ripple effect significantly impacts all sectors of legal practice.



# A FEARLESS BAR

- 3.4. As such, I will prioritize the enhancement of our court system. By improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our courts, we can enhance the appeal and efficacy of our legal services, both domestically and internationally. This strategic focus will not only bolster confidence in Nigeria's legal system but also attract and retain investments, fostering economic growth and development.
- 3.5. The repercussions of our current dysfunctional court system are particularly poignant in cases involving fundamental human rights and criminal matters. These cases, which are crucial as they pertain to the life and liberty of citizens, often face significant delays. Many cases take years to reach a conclusion, and the appellate process can further prolong matters, sometimes spanning decades.
- 3.6. Moreover, disputes arising in corporate practice, such as contractual disagreements, can languish in courts for up to a decade before reaching a resolution. These delays have adverse implications for businesses, especially in time-sensitive projects like construction and infrastructure ventures.
- 3.7. While many factors are responsible for the inordinate delays in justice delivery, I believe that erratic court sittings contribute significantly to the delays. To address this issue, I will set up a court monitoring system under which court sittings in every jurisdiction will be published on a weekly basis. This will help legal practitioners and litigants to identify judges who sit regularly and those who do not. I believe that the publication of court sittings which will call public attention to the frequency of sittings by each judge, will spur judges to sit more regularly.
- 3.8. Additionally, the NBA under my leadership will institutionalise a system of recognition of judges who demonstrate hard work, diligence, and character in the performance of their judicial functions to provide an incentive for good conduct on the Bench.
- 3.9. In the light of the challenges outlined, I am dedicated to prioritizing justice reform if entrusted with the role of NBA President. With a comprehensive approach, addressing these issues will be a central pillar of my administration, aimed at fostering a legal system that is more efficient, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all stakeholders. Together, we will leave no stone unturned in our pursuit of a fair and equitable justice system for every individual in our society.



# A FEARLESS BAR

## ENHANCED EFFICIENCY IN ADMINISTRATION OF COURTS

- 3.10. In leading the NBA, I am dedicated to spearheading a critical transformation in the way our courts are administered. Together with esteemed colleagues and stakeholders, we will advocate for a fundamental shift from the current practice where judicial officers are burdened with both court administration and the delivery of justice.
- 3.11. Having garnered valuable insights from years of legal practice, particularly in courtroom proceedings, I recognise the pressing need to address the administrative challenges faced by our Judiciary. Tasks such as managing court operations, overseeing judiciary staffing, implementing case-flow management systems, and maintaining court facilities demand specialized managerial expertise beyond the scope of traditional legal training. Thus, judges should not engage in these administrative tasks for several reasons. First, their primary responsibility lies in dispensing justice and interpreting the law. Engaging in administrative tasks detracts from their core functions and may compromise the quality and efficiency of judicial decision-making. Second, administrative tasks such as personnel management, budgeting, and facilities maintenance require specialised skills and expertise that are not typically part of a judge's training or experience as a legal professional.
- 3.12. Furthermore, separating judicial functions from administrative duties will help uphold the principle of judicial independence. When judges are not burdened with administrative responsibilities, they can focus impartially on adjudicating cases without undue influence or distraction. By delegating administrative tasks to qualified professionals, courts can operate more efficiently and effectively. Judges can devote their time and energy to hearing cases and ensuring the fair and timely resolution of disputes.
- 3.13. Involvement in administrative matters may also create conflicts of interest or the appearance of bias, particularly in cases where court resources or personnel are involved. Maintaining a clear separation between judicial and administrative roles will help preserve judicial integrity and impartiality.
- 3.14. Through careful planning and diligent implementation, the NBA under my leadership will work assiduously with other stakeholders to create a judiciary that is better equipped to meet the evolving needs of our society and deliver swift, fair, and accessible justice for all.

## RESOURCES, MANPOWER, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- 3.15. I am dedicated to ushering in a transformative era of judicial reform, tackling the systemic challenges confronting our justice system with bold leadership. Recognizing the urgent need to address infrastructural inadequacies, manpower shortages, and support staff deficiencies, I will engage with key stakeholders across government and the Judiciary to mobilise necessary resources to implement urgent reforms.
- 3.16. Under my leadership, the NBA will amplify calls for urgent action to rectify the infrastructural decay in our court system. To achieve this, I will engage with key stakeholders including the heads of all courts in the country, Federal and State Attorneys-General, members of the National and State Houses of Assembly particularly the judiciary committees. I will spearhead efforts to assess and address infrastructural deficiencies comprehensively.
- 3.17. Additionally, I will prioritize safeguarding the principles of judicial independence and autonomy while ensuring transparency and accountability in resource utilization. Through strategic initiatives and collaborative endeavours, we will bolster the Judiciary's integrity and capacity to deliver efficient, impartial, and accessible justice for all.
- 3.18. This TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP approach aims not only to resolve pressing challenges within our justice sector but also to cultivate a FEARLESS BAR dedicated to upholding the rule of law and serving the interests of society.

## TECHNOLOGY IN THE JUSTICE SECTOR

- 3.19. I recognise the pivotal role of technology in revolutionizing our justice sector, and I am committed to advocating for its utilisation. It is time we did away with the strenuous and outdated court recording methods of longhand transcription which impede efficiency and judicial productivity. The NBA, under my TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP, will champion the call for the adoption of verbatim recording or transcription, liberating judicial time for more critical tasks. I will advocate for a cultural shift towards viewing technology as an enabler rather than a threat, fostering a fearless approach to embracing innovation in the legal profession.



## RESOURCES, MANPOWER, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- 3.20. We must invest in comprehensive training and support of the judicial officers and the judiciary staff on technology use tailored to the needs of the judicial sector.
- 3.21. Post-Covid 19, several jurisdictions including in Africa have adopted the use of technology for efficient justice delivery; we must not be left behind. My administration will actively engage with judicial authorities at all levels to seamlessly integrate technology into justice delivery processes. By fostering a culture of innovation and fearlessness, we will harness the full potential of technology to propel our justice sector into the future, ensuring efficient and equitable access to justice for all, at minimal cost to the litigant.

## ADMINISTRATION OF CIVIL JUSTICE BILL

- 3.22. As a staunch advocate for enhancing the efficiency and speed of justice delivery in our justice sector, I am deeply committed to driving transformative change. I wholeheartedly endorse the groundbreaking Administration of Civil Justice Bill, a revolutionary initiative designed to address the bottlenecks causing delays in civil justice administration in Nigeria. I am proud to say that the Judiciary Committee of the Nigerian Bar Association, Lagos Branch chaired by Mrs. Funke Adekoya, SAN (which I set up during my time as Chairman of the Branch and whose work I was deeply involved in) played an important role in the drafting of this Bill. This visionary Bill, which I proudly support, seeks to revolutionize our legal landscape through innovative measures set up to streamline court processes and eliminate unnecessary delays.
- 3.23. The laudable initiatives of the Bill include establishing clear timelines for case management, modernizing service of processes, strengthening judicial oversight, combating dilatory tactics with sanctions, and embracing technological innovation for transparent and accurate court proceedings.
- 3.24. I note that only two states – Ekiti and Delta states – have enacted this Bill into Law. If entrusted with the leadership of the NBA, I pledge to vigorously advocate for the enactment and implementation of the Administration of Civil Justice Bill and its variants nationwide. This initiative represents a pivotal step towards addressing the systemic dysfunction and delays plaguing our court system. The NBA, under my TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP, will play a proactive role in driving meaningful reform, ensuring that justice is not only accessible but also expeditiously delivered.



## REORIENTATION

- 3.25. Reforming the Nigerian justice sector requires a shift in orientation among legal professionals, fostering collaboration rather than blame between the Bar and the Bench. We must collectively prioritize just, efficient, timely, and cost-effective dispute resolution over technicalities and procedural hurdles.
- 3.26. The overarching purpose should be the resolution of substantive issues between litigants, necessitating a departure from reliance on procedural tactics.
- 3.27. If elected as NBA President, I will work towards actualising this reorientation and an alignment of the concerns of both the Bar and the Bench.

## THE RANK OF SENIOR ADVOCATE OF NIGERIA

- 3.28. If elected NBA President, I will work towards ensuring that assessment of eligibility to elevation to the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria is qualitative rather than quantitative. The quality of jurisprudential contribution of cases prosecuted by aspirants to the rank should determine their eligibility to be considered for elevation, not number of cases they have successfully concluded.
- 3.29. This approach will tackle the problem of frivolous lawsuits maintained in court in the hope of attaining eligibility for the rank. The effect of de-emphasizing number of cases will be a reduction of case backlog otherwise caused by the present requirement.

## ENFORCING REGULATION AND UPHOLDING DISCIPLINE

- 4.1. The NBA has held out itself as a dependable guarantor for the competence and conduct of its members. While scrutiny often falls on individual practitioners, there is a lesser emphasis on examining the systemic and organizational factors that might contribute to lapses in practice.
- 4.2. My aspiration, which forms the bedrock of the FEARLESS BAR campaign, is to elevate our Association to a higher standard. This campaign is not just about rhetoric; it is about a fundamental shift in how we view and uphold integrity within our profession.



- 4.3. Self-regulation is a privilege that comes with enormous responsibilities and expectations. There is however a growing sense within the profession that our self-regulatory and disciplinary mechanisms lack transparency and efficiency. The NBA under my leadership will champion the reform and strengthening of the regulatory and disciplinary mechanisms and procedures in the profession to effectively enforce ethical professional conduct by legal practitioners in a timely and cost-effective manner.
- 4.4. Let me be clear: when I speak of reforming self-regulation and discipline, I speak to all members of our profession—both the Bar and the Bench. Our first duty, as outlined by the NBA's core mission, is to uphold the integrity and independence of our legal system in Nigeria. If elected as President of the NBA, I pledge to actively collaborate with stakeholders to rejuvenate and, where necessary, revolutionize our self-regulatory and disciplinary frameworks for all members of the profession.

## THE JUDICIARY

- 4.5. The current regulatory and disciplinary framework for judicial officers by the National Judicial Council (NJC) needs urgent review. The NBA's presence on the NJC should not just be symbolic as it can be pivotal to ensuring fairness and accountability. We cannot overlook concerns about the NJC's consistency and potential biases, especially regarding high-ranking judicial figures.
- 4.6. If elected President, I will engage directly with the Chief Justice of Nigeria and the Heads of Courts at Federal and State levels to address structural inadequacies and promote a more inclusive and effective disciplinary process.
- 4.7. To ensure effective representation of the interest of the NBA at the NJC, I will ensure that only the most competent, courageous, and respected members of the Bar who can speak truth to power and insist on due process are appointed into the NJC as representatives of the NBA. In addition to the appointment of our strongest and most respected voices into the NJC, one critical reform I will work tirelessly to achieve is granting the representatives of the NBA at the NJC, full participation in all proceedings, including those relating to discipline of judicial officers. It is inconceivable that those who bring forward complaints are excluded from crucial discussions.



- 4.8. The FEARLESS BAR stands for an initiative-taking approach to reform. We will work tirelessly to ensure that dissatisfied parties have a voice and that our disciplinary processes reflect the highest standards of transparency and fairness.
- 4.9. If I assume the role of NBA President, one of my key objectives will be to discourage the prevalent practice where dissatisfied parties in judicial proceedings resort to filing petitions with the NJC instead of utilizing their right to appeal. While acknowledging the need to fairly address genuine grievances against judicial officers, it is imperative to prevent the abuse of the right to file petitions against judicial officers.
- 4.10. Judicial officers already shoulder significant responsibilities and duties. Adding the weight of operating under the constant threat of frivolous petitions only exacerbates their challenges. It is crucial to strike a balance where genuine grievances are addressed while preventing the misuse of complaint mechanisms that can undermine the integrity of the judicial process.
- 4.11. If elected President of the NBA, I will on behalf of the NBA engage with the Chief Justice of Nigeria and the Heads of Courts at Federal and State levels to put measures in place to ensure that the right to issue a complaint concerning judicial conduct by way of petition to the NJC is further regulated to discourage frivolous petitions.

## THE BAR

- 4.12. The state of regulation and discipline within the Bar is a matter of profound concern. The current procedures and processes governing the regulation and discipline of Bar members are unnecessarily convoluted.
- 4.13. The current disciplinary process for lawyers in Nigeria is plagued by protracted delays, inefficiencies, and a shortage of resources, and this fosters a perception that the legal profession does not accord the disciplining of its members the seriousness it deserves.
- 4.14. Indeed, recent decisions of the Supreme Court have shed light on significant structural flaws in the disciplinary processes of our profession. These flaws not only hinder the efficacy of disciplinary measures but also erode trust in the integrity of our profession.





- 4.15. If entrusted with the Presidency of the NBA, I will be committed to upholding the highest standards of professionalism and accountability and will prioritize the streamlining of disciplinary procedures within the Bar.
- 4.16. I will collaborate with all relevant stakeholders to ensure the decentralization of the disciplinary proceedings of the Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Committee ("LPDC"). To this end, the NBA under my leadership will push for the establishment of zonal divisions of the LPDC in the six geopolitical zones with jurisdiction over petitions originating in their respective zones. Additionally, the NBA under my leadership will propose the prescription of a 12-month period for the conclusion of disciplinary proceedings before the LPDC.
- 4.17. The current structure and operational model of the LPDC are fundamentally inadequate for realizing an efficient disciplinary system within the legal profession. A significant issue lies in the composition of the LPDC. Presently, many members of the LPDC are ex-officio members burdened with their official responsibilities, leaving them unable to commit the necessary time to ensure the LPDC's effective functioning. I will work closely with all relevant stakeholders, particularly the Body of Benchers to reform the LPDC to improve its operational efficiency, by advocating for permanent members whose sole job description is sitting over petitions.
- 4.18. The foundation of a FEARLESS BAR lies in our collective commitment to transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct. We must prioritize the integrity of our profession and always uphold the highest standards of professionalism. It is imperative that all stakeholders recognize the necessity of enhancing our self-regulatory and disciplinary procedures and are willing to collaborate in pursuit of these objectives and I intend to see to it that all stakeholders key into this ideal.

## **SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS**

- 5.1. Our vision for the Bar transcends sectional boundaries, ethnic affiliations, and racial divisions. Whether you practice law in Aguata or Kafanchan, whether you are a seasoned veteran or a young practitioner, our goal is to create a Bar that equally values and supports every member, leaving no one behind.
- 5.2. On this note, I am committed to fostering inclusivity and representation for all members, including special interest groups within the legal profession. Special interest groups play a



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crucial role in advocating for specific needs and concerns within our diverse membership. Our key strategies to support and empower these groups for a more inclusive and dynamic NBA include acknowledging the unique contributions and challenges faced by special interest groups within the legal profession, establishing formal recognition and support mechanisms for special interest groups within the NBA structure, ensuring fair representation of special interest groups in NBA decision-making bodies and committees, amongst others.

5.3. I envision a Bar where every lawyer, regardless of background or location, enjoys equal privileges, opportunities, and representation. It is time to bridge the gaps and foster unity within our legal community

#### **WOMEN'S FORUM**

5.4. With the wave of inclusion, the NBA Women's Forum is already making notable strides. If entrusted with the presidency of the NBA, I pledge my support to further amplify its impact. While women have made significant strides in closing the gender gap, I passionately believe that achieving true gender parity requires continued efforts.

4.4 There is a pressing need for comprehensive modifications and adjustments to address the specific needs of women in the legal profession. This includes enhancing conditions of service to accommodate and empower women fully. As President, I will champion initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality to advance a supportive environment and ensuring that women's voices and contributions are valued and recognized at every level.

#### **YOUNG LAWYERS FORUM**

4.5 As part of our sustainability drive, there is a need to build the bridge for the future by committing to trans-generational initiatives. With the demographic shift occasioned by new entrants to the profession, we must begin to look toward the future by empowering and supporting young lawyers. Should I emerge NBA President, I am committed to championing the interests of young lawyers by prioritizing access to essential resources and opportunities for their growth and development.

4.6 Mentorship will play a crucial role in nurturing the next generation of legal professionals. I will work to establish robust mentoring programmes that pair young lawyers with experienced mentors who can provide guidance, support, and valuable insights into the



legal profession. Additionally, training initiatives and capacity-building programmes will be implemented to equip young lawyers with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in their careers. The NBA Lagos Branch under my leadership achieved these laudable objectives. The NBA can go one better under my leadership. legal profession. Additionally, training initiatives and capacity-building programmes will be implemented to equip young lawyers with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in their careers. The NBA Lagos Branch under my leadership achieved these laudable objectives. The NBA can go one better under my leadership.

4.7 Moreover, I recognize the importance of creating ample opportunities for self-development and professional advancement among young lawyers. This includes organising networking events, educational workshops, and career fairs for young lawyers and my administration will vigorously see to this.

4.8 Additionally, working with the Young Lawyers Forum (YLF), the NBA under my leadership will collaborate with foreign law firms to provide cross border internship and secondment opportunities for young lawyers.

## **OTHER SPECIALISED FORA**

4.9 Other Specialised Law Fora, such as the Capital Market Solicitors Association, the Law Officers Association of Nigeria (LOAN), the Association of Lawyers with Disabilities in Nigeria (ALDIN), and in-house counsel groups, among others, represent valuable segments of our legal community. If elected President, I am committed to wholeheartedly supporting these groups to achieve their respective objectives and to foster fairness by offering members of these groups the same opportunities available to members of all other segments and groups within the NBA.

4.10 Amongst others, I will ensure that requisite facilities are provided to members of ALDIN at NBA events, to make their participation at such events seamless.



## UNWAVERING VOICE FOR JUSTICE AND THE RULE OF LAW

***Above all, my manifesto pledges to be the unwavering voice for members of the legal profession and the Nigerian people. As a leader, I recognize the solemn duty to speak out against societal injustices and hold the government accountable for its promises. I am committed to being that voice—a voice for the people, advocating for transparency, equity, and justice in all aspects of governance. Together, we will strive to uphold the values of democracy, champion the rights of every citizen, and work tirelessly to build a better future for our nation. We will never remain silent in the face of injustice, nor will we allow evil to thrive unchallenged.***

## MISCELLANEOUS

- 7.1. Genuine and impactful change requires courteous and constructive engagement with all stakeholders invested in the progress of the legal profession in Nigeria and this, I am committed to do, together with every segment of the profession.
- 7.2. I firmly believe that meaningful change is best achieved through respectful dialogue, collaboration, and a shared commitment to the betterment of our profession. I am encouraged by the groundwork laid by past leaders of our great Association and if elected President, I will make a conscious effort to continue and expand upon the initiatives of these great leaders.
- 7.3. With these principles guiding our actions, I am confident that we can effect substantial progress and restore the esteemed reputation of the legal profession in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

- 8.1. I am deeply thankful for the chance to unveil this manifesto to my esteemed colleagues. I appeal to each one of you to entrust me with the opportunity to play my part in enhancing the standing of our profession and uplifting the lives of its members. Together, let us build a Fearless Bar, guided by courage, integrity, and a steadfast commitment to excellence.

Sincerely,

***Chukwuka Ikwuazom, SAN, FCTI***



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