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THANK YOU.

A Statement by Lateef Omoyemi Akangbe, SAN

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Distinguished Colleagues,

Thank you.

Before I say anything else, before I address anything else, I owe you that. Thank you.

Thank you to every lawyer who stayed awake for two nights to cast a single vote. You refreshed a broken portal at 1 AM, at 3 AM, at 5 AM. You set alarms. You tried on your phones, on your laptops, on borrowed devices. You sent screenshots to your branch WhatsApp groups documenting every error, every timeout, every failed authentication. You did not give up. You did not go to bed. You did not surrender your franchise to a system that was collapsing around you.

Some of you succeeded in voting. The vast majority of you did not. Some of you tried for hours and were locked out by a platform that was never built to carry the weight of your democratic will. You were disenfranchised not by choice but by infrastructure. Not by apathy but by failure.

I saw you. I saw the young lawyer who posted at 4 AM that she had been trying for four hours and could not get past the authentication screen. I saw the senior lawyer who stayed up with his associates so they could try together. I saw the branch chairmen who spent the night fielding calls from members who could not vote and did not know why.

Thank you to every one of the 141 branches of the Nigerian Bar Association. From the largest branches in Lagos and Abuja to the smallest in the remotest parts of this country, your chairmen, your secretaries, your executive committees, and your members showed up for this election with a determination that the system did not deserve. You mobilised. You encouraged. You held your members together through a night of chaos. The branches are the backbone of this Association, and last night you proved it.

What you all did over these two nights was not just an act of voting. It was an act of defiance against a system that made it as hard as possible for you to be heard. The Bar will not forget it. I will not forget it.

Now let me say plainly what every lawyer in Nigeria and the general public already knows.

This election was shambolic. It is a shame to the Bar.

The question that must be asked, and answered, is a simple one: why the rush?

The ECNBA unilaterally moved the NEC-approved election date from 20 July to 18 July without obtaining NEC approval. At the meeting of 15 July 2026, in the presence of the Honourable Attorney-General of the Federation and the Chairman of the Body of Benchers, an agreement was reached to postpone by one week to allow proper sensitisation on the new SMS-based voting mechanism, a mechanism that had been adopted less than forty-eight hours before the original election date. That agreement was not honoured. The ECNBA changed the verification method from email to SMS on 16 July and, rather than giving the membership the time to adjust, insisted that the election proceed two days later. Eighty-two thousand lawyers were expected to navigate a new authentication system they had never tested, on a platform they had never used, in the middle of the night.

The result was predictable. The platform collapsed within its first hour. The ECNBA attributed this to a "deliberate, coordinated, and sustained cyberattack." Whether that claim is true or not, and it remains unverified by any independent authority, it does not answer the question that matters: why did the attack succeed? A cyberattack on an election platform is not an unforeseeable act of God. It is the single most predictable threat in any online election in 2026. In any serious deployment, the platform would have been subjected to rigorous stress testing and ethical hacking long before election day to identify and close precisely these vulnerabilities. A platform built to withstand an attack would have degraded under pressure. This one did not degrade. It disappeared. This was not a cybersecurity failure but a capacity failure. And it is a capacity failure that was foreseeable, foreseen, and warned about, in writing, since June.

I, a presidential candidate in this election, was completely disenfranchised. I could not vote. The Chairman of the ECNBA and the NBA President personally sent me over five separate links to access the voting portal. Not one of them worked. Let that settle for a moment. The two most senior officials overseeing this election intervened directly to help a presidential candidate cast his ballot, and even their intervention

could not overcome the failure of the platform they deployed. If the Chairman and the President of the Association cannot get the system to work for a candidate, they are personally assisting to access the voting portal; what happened to the ordinary member in Jalingo or Ado-Ekiti who had no one highly placed to call?

The numbers tell the story.

Let me help the profession visualise the scale of what happened.

In the 2022 NBA National Elections, 58.61 per cent of the total number of eligible voters cast their ballots, with the winner scoring about 22,342 votes. In the 2024 election, 56.4 per cent cast their ballots, and the purported winner of that election, the sitting NBA President, Mazi Afam Josiah Osigwe, SAN, scored approximately 20,435 votes. Those were imperfect elections, but they were elections in which the majority of the profession participated and the outcome, whatever one's view of the process, carried the visible weight of democratic participation.

In this election, with 82,164 accredited voters, the ECNBA's own reported figures suggest that approximately 27 per cent of eligible voters cast their ballots. Not even a third of the profession voted. Twenty-seven per cent. The total number of lawyers who managed to vote in the entire 2026 election is roughly the same as the number of votes a single candidate received in 2024. The sitting President won his own election two years ago with almost the same number of votes as the total electorate that voted yesterday. We have gone from nearly 60 per cent participation to 27 per cent in four years. This is a catastrophic regression.

And let me be clear about the cause: that 27 per cent figure, if the ECNBA's numbers are to be believed at all, does not reflect voter apathy. It reflects voter suppression. Not for want of trying, but through a calculated combination of systemic failure, platform collapse, untested authentication changes, and the stubborn insistence on proceeding with an election that everyone involved knew was not ready. Thousands of lawyers who wanted to vote, who tried to vote, who stayed awake for two consecutive nights to vote, were locked out by a platform that could not carry them and an electoral body that would not wait for them. An election with this level of suppressed turnout is not a democratic exercise; it is rather a controlled outcome dressed in the language of democracy.

There are also credible, documented reports of voters who were able to cast their ballots more than once on the same platform. If the system permitted double voting, the integrity of every single ballot is in question. One member, one vote is not a slogan. It is a constitutional guarantee. If the platform could not enforce it,

the platform was not fit for purpose, and the results it produced are tainted at source.

This election cannot pass any credibility test.

Let us be honest with ourselves about what the Nigerian Bar Association is. We are the organised body of legal practitioners in the largest economy in Africa. We are the profession that holds others to account. We are the institution that demands transparency from government, that insists on accountability from public officers, that challenges the judiciary when it falls short, and that defends the rule of law when no one else will.

How, then, can we accept an election in which our own platform collapsed, our own verification system was changed without adequate notice, our own members were locked out for hours, our own presidential ballot displayed one candidate's photograph and not the others — a defect that was not corrected until after voting had commenced and only after alarm had already been raised by candidates — and our own turnout was driven to levels that would embarrass a village council election? If we cannot conduct our own internal affairs with integrity, what moral authority do we have to demand integrity from anyone else?

This question is not academic. Nigeria faces general elections in 2027. The courts will be called upon to adjudicate disputes. The public will turn to the NBA to assess whether the rule of law was upheld. If the Bar's own most recent election was a spectacle of systemic failure, disenfranchisement, and unanswered questions, the profession's voice on the conduct of the national elections will carry no weight. We will have forfeited the moral authority to hold others to a standard we could not meet ourselves. That is not a future any lawyer in this country should accept.

I will not, in this statement, discuss outcomes, numbers, or declarations. That is not what this moment requires.

What this moment requires is honesty. And the truth is this: an election in which thousands of eligible, willing, determined voters were prevented from casting their ballots by a platform that was not fit for purpose cannot, in good conscience, be treated as though it produced the unimpeachable will of the profession. The administrative collapse was too deep, too widespread, and too well-documented to be papered over with a result.

I am reviewing all my options alongside my team. I will communicate a comprehensive, fully informed, and principled position on next steps shortly. When I do, it will be grounded in evidence, anchored in law, and driven by a single objective: the protection of the democratic rights of every member of this

Association who was denied their vote. Every screenshot, every failed authentication, every locked-out voter is being documented, catalogued, and preserved. Accountability is not optional. It is coming.

This campaign was never about one man. It was about the proposition that the NBA can be better, that it must be better, and that the lawyers of this country deserve an Association that works for them.

Whatever comes next, know this: I entered this contest to **Elevate the Bar**. That mission did not begin with this election, and it does not end with it. The Bar is bigger than any single election, any single candidate, and any single result. The work continues. The fight for a Bar that is transparent, accountable, and worthy of the profession it represents continues. And I am not going anywhere.

Thank you for your courage. Thank you for your sacrifice. Thank you for staying.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lateef' followed by a stylized surname.

Lateef Omoyemi Akangbe, SAN, FCIArb

Candidate for President

Nigerian Bar Association