

4 July 2026

The Chairman
Electoral Committee of the Nigerian Bar Association (ECNBA)
NBA House, 9 Oro Ago Street
Garki, Abuja

Dear Sir,

**FORMAL PROTEST AGAINST THE UNILATERAL RESCHEDULING
OF THE ELECTION DATE AND THE STRUCTURALLY DEFICIENT
GUIDELINES FOR THE CANDIDATES' DEBATE DATED 3 JULY 2026
BUT PUBLISHED ON 4 JULY 2026**

I write in my capacity as a presidential candidate in the 2026 NBA National Elections to place on record my formal protest against two circulars issued by the Electoral Committee dated 3 July 2026 but published on 4 July 2026: the Revised Timetable for Outstanding Activities in the 2026 NBA National Elections, and the Guidelines for the Candidates' Debate and Manifesto Day.

Both circulars were communicated to me, and to the entire membership, simultaneously, by mass email and public publication, without prior structured engagement with the candidates whose interests they directly and materially affect. Both contain provisions that raise serious concerns about procedural fairness, stakeholder consultation, and the structural integrity of the electoral process. I address each in turn.

1. The Unilateral Rescheduling of the Election Date

The Revised Timetable announces that the date of the election has been changed from Monday, 20 July 2026 to Saturday, 18 July 2026. The circular states that this change was made “further to deliberations at the meeting of the Committee with candidates held on the 2nd of July 2026, and following some concerns earlier raised by critical stakeholders.”

I must correct this characterisation firmly and on the record.

At the meeting of 2 July 2026, one candidate for the office of General Secretary, Mr Okey Leo Ohagba, Esq., raised the question of whether the election date should be moved to a weekend. Mr Ohagba expressed the view, which I acknowledge as not

unreasonable in principle, that a weekend election would facilitate greater voter participation. The matter was discussed briefly. It was not put to a vote. It was not formally agreed upon. It was not ratified by the candidates present, either by consensus or by any other recognised decision-making procedure. No resolution was reached. No communiqué was issued. The meeting moved on to other business.

For the Committee to now present this rescheduling as a decision taken “further to deliberations” at that meeting is, with respect, a mischaracterisation of what occurred. What occurred was a suggestion by one candidate for one office in the course of a general discussion. What did not occur was a decision by the candidates, or by any quorum of candidates, to endorse a change to the constitutionally mandated election timetable. The Committee has converted an informal suggestion into a formal timetable revision without the consent of the stakeholders most affected, and has then attributed the decision to those very stakeholders in its public circular.

The manner of communication compounds the concern. I, as a presidential candidate, did not receive prior notice that this change was being contemplated, let alone implemented. I learned of it the same way every other member of the Nigerian Bar Association learned of it: through a mass circular published to the entire profession on the morning of 4 July 2026. A change of this magnitude, affecting the election date for a national election of over 80,000 voters, deserved at a minimum a formal notification to all candidates in advance of public announcement, an opportunity to comment, and a structured process for recording consent or objection. None of this was done.

I further note that the rescheduling compresses an already tight timetable by two days and introduces a sequence of critical activities, including the publication of the Final Voters Register, the mock voting exercise, the final systems audit, and the pre-election platform lockdown, that now fall within a window so narrow that any slippage at any stage will cascade through the remainder of the process with no room for recovery. The Committee has purchased the appearance of stakeholder responsiveness at the cost of operational prudence.

I formally object to this rescheduling. I reserve all my rights in respect of it.

2. The Structurally Deficient Guidelines for the Candidates’ Debate

The Guidelines for the Candidates’ Debate and Manifesto Day dated 3 July 2026 but published on 4 July 2026 set out, in considerable detail, the format, timing, rules and running order for the debate scheduled for 8 July 2026. I have studied them carefully. While certain provisions are unobjectionable and reflect standard practice, the structure adopted for the presidential debate segment contains a fundamental deficiency that, if not corrected, will render the exercise a series of parallel monologues rather than a genuine debate.

2.1 The prohibition on cross-examination and rebuttal

Rule 15 of the Guidelines provides that “Candidates shall not use their presentation time to address, challenge, criticise, or respond to any other candidate.” Rule 16 provides that “No candidate may interrupt, heckle, or make any verbal or non-verbal interjection during the presentation of any other candidate.” Rule 30 provides that “Presidential candidates shall not engage in direct exchanges or rebuttals with each other.”

Taken together, these rules strip the presidential segment of every element that distinguishes a debate from a sequence of individual presentations. A debate, by definition, is a structured contest of ideas in which propositions are advanced, challenged, tested and defended. Cross-examination, rebuttal and direct engagement between candidates are not incidental features of a debate. They are constitutive of it. Without them, what remains is a manifesto presentation exercise, which may have its own value but should not be called a debate and should not be presented to the electorate as one.

The electorate’s interest in a presidential debate is not merely to hear each candidate recite prepared remarks in sequence. It is to see how each candidate responds under pressure, how each handles a challenge to a stated position, and how each engages with the ideas, the proposals and the criticisms of the others. A format that forbids precisely this engagement deprives the membership of the very information a debate is supposed to provide, and substitutes in its place a controlled performance in which no candidate’s claims are tested by anyone other than a moderator whose questions are pre-curated and whose time allocation is fixed.

2.2 The fixed and unalterable speaking order

Rule 29 of the Guidelines provides that the order of speaking in all three phases of the presidential debate shall be: Aare Olumuyiwa Akinboro SAN, Lateef Omoyemi Akangbe SAN FCI Arb, and Oyinkansola Badejo-Okunsanya SAN (Mrs B.), and that “this order is determined by the ECNBA and shall not be altered.”

I accept without reservation that an order of speaking must be determined for the opening statements, and that seniority at the Bar is a reasonable and defensible criterion for that purpose. What I do not accept is that the same fixed, unalterable order should apply across all three phases of the debate, including the response to moderator questions and the wrap-up statements. In every established competitive debating format, from parliamentary debate to presidential debate in national elections across the common law world, the order of speaking is varied between rounds to ensure that no candidate is permanently advantaged or disadvantaged by the position in which they speak.

A candidate who speaks first on every question has the advantage of framing the discussion. A candidate who speaks last on every question has the advantage of

responding to everything that has been said. A candidate who speaks in the middle on every question has neither advantage and must contend, throughout the entire event, with the structural disadvantage of following one candidate and preceding another in a fixed sequence. The standard remedy is rotation: the order is varied between rounds so that each candidate occupies each position at least once. This is not a novel proposal. It is elementary debating practice. Its omission from the Guidelines is conspicuous.

2.3 The absence of any rebuttal round

The three-phase structure of the presidential segment, Opening Statements (7 minutes), Moderator Questions (3 minutes) and Wrap-Up Statements (2 minutes), contains no dedicated rebuttal round. In every serious presidential debate format, candidates are given an opportunity, however brief, to respond to what the other candidates have said. This is the mechanism through which claims are tested, inconsistencies are exposed, and the electorate is given the information it needs to make a genuinely informed choice.

The omission of any rebuttal mechanism, combined with the prohibition on direct engagement in Rules 15, 16 and 30, means that a candidate may make a demonstrably false or misleading claim in the course of the debate, and no other candidate may correct it. The electorate will hear the claim unchallenged. This is not a format designed to produce truth. It is a format designed to produce comfort.

3. What I Respectfully Ask

In the circumstances, I respectfully ask the Committee to do three things before the debate proceeds on 8 July 2026:

- (a) Introduce a rotation of the speaking order across the three phases of the presidential debate, so that no candidate occupies the same position throughout the entire event.
- (b) Introduce a structured rebuttal round, even if brief, in which each presidential candidate is given a defined period, which need not exceed two minutes, to respond to claims or positions advanced by the other candidates during their presentations.
- (c) Amend Rules 15 and 30 to permit candidates, during the rebuttal round and within the bounds of professional courtesy, to address directly the positions advanced by other candidates, which is the very essence of a debate.

4. The Consequence of Inaction

I wish to be clear about the consequence of the Committee's failure to address these structural deficiencies.

I do not fear the debate. I welcome it. I have a manifesto that can withstand scrutiny, a record that can bear examination, and a vision for the Bar that I am prepared to defend against any challenge, from any quarter, in any format that is fair. What I will not do is lend the credibility of my candidacy and the dignity of the Rank I hold to a proceeding that is called a debate but is designed as a controlled performance in which no claim is tested, no position is challenged, and no candidate is required to do anything more demanding than read a prepared statement to a clock.

If the structural deficiencies identified in this letter are not remedied before 8 July 2026, I will have no option but to withdraw my participation from the Candidates' Debate and Manifesto Day. I will do so not as an act of evasion but as a principled refusal to legitimise a format that, in its present form, does not serve the electorate, does not test the candidates, and does not deserve to be called a debate.

I will, in that event, make my manifesto and my positions available to the entire membership of the Nigerian Bar Association through my own channels and through any fair and open forum that will allow them to be examined, questioned and tested in the manner that the membership deserves.

I respectfully request the Committee's urgent attention to this matter and a substantive response in writing before close of business on Monday, 6 July 2026.

Please accept the assurances of my highest professional regard.

Yours faithfully,



Lateef Omoyemi Akangbe, SAN, LLM, MBA, FCI Arb
Candidate, Office of the President
Nigerian Bar Association

cc: Members, Electoral Committee of the Nigerian Bar Association
The President, Nigerian Bar Association
The General Secretary, Nigerian Bar Association
All Qualified Presidential Candidates, 2026 NBA National Elections