

MAX & ROLL PARTNERS

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Our Ref: **Your Ref:** **Date:** 29th August, 2026.

THROUGH:

The Chairman,
Nigerian Bar Association, Garki Branch,
Abuja.

TO:

The President,
Nigerian Bar Association,
Abuja.

**REQUEST FOR INSTITUTIONAL ACTION AND REFERRAL FOR
INVESTIGATION REGARDING THE ALLEGED HOLDING OUT AS A LEGAL
PRACTITIONER BY MR. MARTINS OTSE (A.K.A. VERYDARKMAN)**

Dear Sir,

I write respectfully through the Chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association, Garki Branch, Abuja, to draw the attention of the President of the Nigerian Bar Association to a matter which, in my considered view, transcends the personality of the individual involved and raises a fundamental question concerning the protection, integrity and dignity of the legal profession in Nigeria.

The matter concerns the recent conduct of Mr. Martins Otse, popularly known as VeryDarkMan (VDM), who, notwithstanding that he is not a person called to the Nigerian Bar and enrolled as a legal practitioner, has publicly appeared in the traditional professional regalia of a Nigerian barrister, consisting of the wig and gown, and has, in the accompanying presentation, portrayed himself in the manner of a lawyer.

I am aware that the immediate controversy arose against the background of his invitation and participation at the Nigerian Bar Association Conference in Port Harcourt. I am also mindful that the Nigerian Bar Association, as an organisation committed to the rule of law, must itself be guided by due process and should not condemn any person without investigation.

My concern, therefore, is not to prejudge Mr. Otse, but to request that the Association take appropriate steps to investigate the circumstances and, where the facts establish the requisite elements, refer the matter to the appropriate law-enforcement authority for action under the Legal Practitioners Act and any other applicable law.

1. THE STATUTORY POSITION

The starting point is section 2(1) of the Legal Practitioners Act, Cap. L11, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004, which provides in substance that a person is entitled to practise as a barrister and solicitor in Nigeria if and only if his name is on the Roll of Legal Practitioners, subject to the provisions of the Act.

Section 24 of the same Act defines a “legal practitioner” as a person entitled in accordance with the Act to practise as a barrister or as a barrister and solicitor, whether generally or for the purpose of a particular office or proceeding.

The significance of these provisions is that membership of the legal profession is not a matter of self-identification. It is a status conferred and recognised by law following the prescribed process of admission and enrolment.

More importantly, *section 22(1)* of the Legal Practitioners Act creates specific offences in respect of persons who are not legal practitioners. It provides, inter alia, that a person other than a legal practitioner commits an offence where he:

“practises, or holds himself out to practise, as a legal practitioner” or “takes or uses the title of legal practitioner” or “wilfully takes or uses any name, title, addition or description falsely implying, or otherwise pretends, that he is a legal practitioner or is qualified or recognised by law to act as a legal practitioner.”

The statutory language is deliberately wider than merely appearing before a court.

The Legislature did not criminalise only the actual performance of legal work. It also addressed the holding out or representation of oneself as a legal practitioner.

That distinction is critical to the present complaint.

2. THE CONDUCT REQUIRES INVESTIGATION

The question, therefore, is not simply whether Mr. Otse physically wore a wig and gown.

The proper legal question is whether, having regard to the totality of the circumstances, the use of the professional regalia, the manner of presentation, the words used, the context and the accompanying publication or representation, he deliberately represented himself as a legal practitioner when he knew that he had not been called to the Nigerian Bar.

That is a question which, in my respectful view, deserves formal investigation.

The recent public material concerning the incident reportedly shows Mr. Otse appearing in full barristerial attire and making a presentation in which he referred to himself as a lawyer. Such material should be preserved and independently examined rather than dismissed as mere entertainment or satire.

This is particularly significant because the Council of Legal Education/Nigerian Law School itself issued a warning in July 2026 against persons who had not yet been called to the Bar wearing legal wigs and gowns and portraying themselves as qualified lawyers. The Council specifically referred to the use of photographs and videos in legal regalia and the representation of such persons as lawyers before formal admission to the Nigerian Bar.

If the law considers such conduct sufficiently serious to warrant an express warning even in respect of persons who have successfully completed their legal education but

are yet to be called to the Bar, it would be difficult to justify treating a similar representation by a person who has never been called to the Bar as entirely inconsequential.

3. JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES

The Supreme Court has consistently recognised that the right to practise law in Nigeria is a statutory status, not an assumed title.

In *Emmanuel Okafor & Ors v Augustine Nweke & Ors* (2007) 10 NWLR (Pt. 1043) 521, the Supreme Court considered sections 2 and 24 of the Legal Practitioners Act and affirmed that a person must satisfy the statutory requirements for recognition as a legal practitioner and that persons outside the statutory class cannot practise law in Nigeria.

Similarly, in *Alhaji Ibrahim Adamu v Alhaji Abdullatif Hassan & Ors* (2014) NGCA 14, the Court of Appeal reaffirmed the effect of section 2(1) of the Legal Practitioners Act that a person is entitled to practise as a barrister and solicitor if and only if his name is on the Roll.

The importance of these authorities is that the legal profession is a closed and regulated profession. The statutory language does not create an open field in which any person may assume the identity, status or professional description of a lawyer.

Indeed, in *Jafar Abubakar v Alhaji Ibrahim Hassan Dankwambo & Ors* (2015), the Court, in discussing the statutory scheme, emphasised that the provisions of the Legal Practitioners Act are designed to prevent persons outside the profession from usurping the status of legal practitioners and described the statutory framework as one which prevents the creation of an uncontrolled “floodgate” of persons outside the profession.

That reasoning is particularly apposite to the present request.

4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WIG AND GOWN

The wig and gown cannot reasonably be regarded as ordinary clothing within the Nigerian legal system.

They are recognised symbols of the advocate appearing in his or her professional capacity.

In *Chief Gani Fawehinmi v Nigerian Bar Association & Ors* (No. 1) (1989) 2 NWLR (Pt. 105) 494, the Supreme Court considered the professional significance of the wig and gown and the rules governing the attire of legal practitioners. The case demonstrates that legal robes have a recognised professional significance within the Nigerian justice system.

I therefore respectfully submit that the issue cannot be reduced to the proposition that “anyone can wear a wig and gown because it is merely clothing.”

The legal question is whether an unqualified person has deliberately appropriated an important professional symbol in circumstances in which the reasonable effect is to represent that he possesses the status of a legal practitioner.

That is precisely why section 22(1)(c) of the Legal Practitioners Act is couched in terms of taking or using a “name, title, addition or description” falsely implying that a person is a legal practitioner or is legally qualified to act as one.

5. THE DANGER OF CREATING A PRECEDENT

This is perhaps the most compelling reason why the Nigerian Bar Association should not ignore the matter.

The issue is bigger than VDM.

Today, it may be one individual wearing a wig and gown and presenting himself as a lawyer.

Tomorrow, another person may do the same.

The next person may appear at a court-related event.

Another may begin signing documents as "Barrister".

Another may commence giving members of the public legal advice for consideration.

Another may advertise himself as a lawyer on social media.

Another may even attempt to appear before a court.

If the profession responds to the first instance with indifference merely because the person is popular, influential or regarded as an entertainer, the profession risks creating an unfortunate precedent by acquiescence.

The law cannot be selectively enforced according to the popularity of the person involved.

What is unlawful when done by an unknown person does not become lawful merely because it is done by a celebrity.

Indeed, the more prominent the individual, the greater the potential for the conduct to be copied and normalised.

The Nigerian Bar Association has a legitimate institutional interest in ensuring that the legal profession remains a regulated profession whose identity and professional insignia cannot be casually appropriated by persons who have not undergone the statutory process of admission.

6. **THIS IS NOT A QUESTION OF PERSONAL ANIMOSITY**

I respectfully emphasise that this request should not be understood as an attempt to silence Mr. Otse, punish criticism of lawyers or interfere with his constitutional freedom of expression.

A person who is not a lawyer remains entitled to criticise lawyers, criticise the NBA, attend public events, make political or social commentary and express his opinions about the administration of justice.

What he cannot do, if the statutory elements are established, is cross the legal boundary between criticising or satirising the profession and falsely assuming the status of a member of that profession.

Freedom of expression cannot, without more, confer a professional status which the law reserves for persons duly called to and enrolled in the legal profession.

The distinction between satire and false professional representation is therefore a matter of fact requiring proper investigation.

7. REQUEST FOR ACTION

In the circumstances, I respectfully request that the President of the Nigerian Bar Association:

Cause the conduct complained of to be formally investigated, including obtaining and preserving the relevant videos, photographs, social-media publications and other evidence;

Ascertain the precise representations made by Mr. Martins Otse in connection with his appearance in wig and gown and determine whether, objectively and subjectively, the circumstances disclose an intention to hold himself out as a legal practitioner;

Where the facts establish the necessary elements, cause a formal petition to be made to the appropriate law-enforcement agency for investigation of possible offences under section 22 of the Legal Practitioners Act and any other applicable law;

Request appropriate legal advice from the relevant authorities where necessary regarding the proper interpretation and application of section 22 to the facts;

Issue, where considered appropriate, a public clarification that the professional status of a legal practitioner in Nigeria derives from lawful Call to the Bar and enrolment and cannot be assumed by self-description, costume, social-media representation or participation in a professional event; and

Consider whether a general advisory should be issued to the public and members of the legal profession to discourage the unauthorised use of professional legal regalia in circumstances capable of creating the impression that the wearer is a qualified legal practitioner.

8. CONCLUSION

The Nigerian Bar Association is not merely an association of lawyers. It is also an important institution in the preservation of the rule of law, professional standards and public confidence in the administration of justice.

The profession has invested generations of sacrifice, training and institutional regulation in ensuring that the public can distinguish a duly qualified legal practitioner from an impostor.

That distinction must be protected.

I therefore respectfully urge the President of the Nigerian Bar Association to treat this matter not as a personality contest or as an attempt to manufacture controversy around Mr. Otse, but as an opportunity to reaffirm a simple and fundamental principle:

A person who has not been called to the Nigerian Bar and whose name is not enrolled as a legal practitioner cannot assume, appropriate or represent himself to the public as a member of the Nigerian legal profession.

The purpose of any action taken should not be vindictive. It should be protective, corrective and precedent-setting.

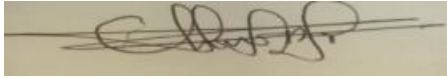
If the facts establish an offence, appropriate action will send a clear message that the legal profession is regulated by law and that its professional identity cannot be assumed by anyone at will.

Conversely, if investigation establishes that the conduct was genuinely and unmistakably theatrical or satirical and did not amount to the statutory offence, the matter can equally be resolved on that basis.

What is important is that the issue should be authoritatively determined rather than casually ignored.

I respectfully request that this letter be given the urgent attention it deserves.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Uwakwe', is written over a horizontal line on a light-colored background.

UWAKWE, ROLAND C.
Legal Practitioner
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