

THE NEXT CHAPTER INAUGURAL ADDRESS

To assume leadership of an institution is to inherit more than an office. One inherits its history, its expectations, its unfinished work and, above all, the obligation to leave it stronger than one found it.

It is with gratitude, humility and a deep sense of purpose that I accept the mandate to serve as Chairperson of the NBA Young Lawyers Forum, Abuja Branch (Unity Bar), for the 2026–2028 term. As the first woman to occupy this office, I appreciate the significance of this moment. Yet history will mean little if it does not translate into meaningful progress. I hope to be remembered not simply for being the first, but for what we accomplish together.

CONTINUITY WITH PURPOSE

We are not starting again; we are building forward. The immediate past administration, led by Mr. Najib Waziri, advanced the Forum through the Professional Development Scheme, Annual Summit, YLF Unity Bar Journal, CLAS-P, mentorship and welfare initiatives. We owe that administration our appreciation—and its work the seriousness of thoughtful continuity.

But continuity is not complacency. Our task is to preserve what works, improve what can work better and create what is still missing. Institutions grow when successive leaders build on progress rather than compete with it.

FROM ACTIVITY TO IMPACT

The question that will guide this administration is not, “How many programmes did we organise?” It is, “What changed because we organised them?” An association can have a full calendar and still leave its members underserved. Activity is visible; impact must be demonstrated.

I want every young lawyer to be able to say, with conviction, that they are better because they belonged to YLF Abuja: better trained, better connected, better informed, better supported and better positioned to serve.

AN AGENDA CENTRED ON PEOPLE

Our priorities are professional excellence; access to opportunity; justice and social impact; knowledge and intellectual leadership; and leadership, welfare and community. These are not slogans. They reflect the realities of young lawyers navigating an evolving profession, uneven access to opportunity and the pressures of building meaningful careers.

We will pursue training that equips members to practise, not merely to collect certificates. We will work to connect talent with mentorship, employment, fellowships, research and emerging areas of practice. We will strengthen platforms for legal scholarship and public-interest service.

And we will remember that behind every professional ambition is a person who needs community, dignity and support.

The profession is changing in technology, client expectations, regulation and the nature of legal work. We cannot prepare tomorrow's lawyers solely with yesterday's assumptions. Our learning must be practical, our thinking forward-looking and our opportunities inclusive.

AN INSTITUTION, NOT A PERSONAL PROJECT

Equally important is the institution we leave behind. No Forum should depend entirely on the personality or energy of its chairperson. Programmes need continuity; decisions need records; partnerships need structure; resources demand accountability; and knowledge must survive the transition from one administration to another.

To my colleagues on the Governing Council: our offices are temporary, but our responsibility is collective. Let us debate ideas without diminishing people, exercise initiative without losing accountability and measure our service by the value delivered to members.

A PROMISE OF INTENTIONAL LEADERSHIP

I will not promise perfection. I promise intentionality: the willingness to listen, to act, to assess our results and to correct our course when necessary. We will not always agree, but we must remain united by the purpose for which we serve.

At the end of this tenure, I hope our legacy is not merely a record of successful events. Let it be found in the lawyer who gained a skill, the practitioner who found a mentor, the member who accessed an opportunity, the volunteer who discovered leadership and the person whose access to justice improved because we chose to act.

A foundation has been laid. The next chapter must be written in the quality of our decisions, the people we empower and the institution we strengthen.

BUILD PEOPLE. CREATE OPPORTUNITIES. SERVE JUSTICE. STRENGTHEN THE INSTITUTION.

This is our mandate. Together, let us make it count.

Simiat Suleiman

Chairperson,
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