

**AN ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE, THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF NIGERIA, HON. JUSTICE MAHMUD MOHAMMED, GCON, DELIVERED AT THE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY OF HONOURABLE JUSTICE ISHAQ BELLO, AS THE NEWLY APPOINTED ACTING CHIEF JUDGE OF THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA, ON 31 MARCH 2015 AT THE MAIN COURT ROOM OF THE SUPREME COURT, AT 2:00 PM.**

I am delighted to address you all on this occasion of the swearing-in ceremony for the newly appointed Acting Chief Judge of the Federal Capital Territory, Hon. Justice Ishaq Bello. I join all colleagues, guests and well wishers here to congratulate you and to wish you well as you take up your assignment as the head of the Judiciary in the Federal Capital Territory.

As your Lordship takes the oath of office and the oath of allegiance, it bears reminding that this oath is not to a man only but is: "**A solemn appeal to God**". It is therefore to God that you will be ultimately responsible. It is from this oath that your duties and responsibilities spring forth and has a binding effect. It is an ethical undertaking to do Justice as well as uphold the Rule of Law in our Courts. As such, my Lord, yours is an especially onerous position, but one which I believe that you are eminently qualified and capable of excelling in.

My Lord, as you are aware, your immediate predecessor is the first Chief Judge of the FCT to retire and benefit from a valedictory session. I urge you as the incoming Chief Judge to see this as a challenge and aim to serve and retire with honour.

To re-iterate, yours is a position of utmost responsibility. This means that in all that you are going to do, you are liable to be called upon to account. Full responsibility is an enormous challenge to take on, and it can feel overwhelming. However, I am confident in your ability and desire to excel. It is important to emphasize that in leadership, certain indispensable qualities must stand out. Your lordship must be thoughtful, considerate and temperate in judgment. You must be aware that you are now **in the dock**, as it were. As a leader, you are responsible for everything that happens in your Court, and you may, quite rightly, be held accountable for

everything that happens, good or bad. I therefore urge you to be thorough and diligent in the administration of the courts, knowing full well that praise or condemnation is largely determined by your conduct.

I note with particular concern the number of corruption cases that are pending before the FCT High Courts and the number that have been returned by the Supreme Court to the trial courts. It bears reminding that posterity does not wear a human face in its judgment. I counsel you to ensure that your work remains like sterling silver that becomes more valuable with age. I therefore urge you to be proactive in seeking out ways to improve justice delivery especially as pertains to the case disposal rate in the FCT High Court of Justice.

My Lord, I must remind you that you are not only the head of the Judiciary, but also ***primus inter pares*** vis-a-vis other Heads of Court. Roger Nierenberg, a director of Connecticut's Stamford Symphony Orchestra, said, "***A leader defines for the team what kind of moment they're in. Is this a moment of transition? Is this a dangerous moment? Your job as conductor is to get the orchestra to act together—powerfully. So what do you do? You say, "Here's where we're headed..." Your job as a leader is to communicate a sense of how things could be—and to show people how to achieve that vision***". Hence, I urge to work cooperatively with the other heads of court and indeed all Judicial Officers in order to ensure cohesiveness and synergy in your resolve to uphold the dignity of the Judiciary.

Permit me to use this opportunity to again assure all Nigerians that, under my leadership, the Judiciary remains resolute and committed to do its constitutional duty during this election period. We will not be swayed or distracted from the course of justice in any election matter that is before or comes before the justice system.

It bears reminding to all heads of courts that you are primarily responsible for the preservation of our nation's democracy. I strongly advise all Judicial Officers not to allow any party or politician to use the Courts to truncate our nation's democracy. We are aware that some unpatriotic

citizens may wish to use the courts to stop the electoral process and I wish to warn in clear terms that we shall not be used as a tool for the breakdown of law and order in our beloved country.

I once again extend my sincere congratulations to you. I pray that the Almighty Allah will continue to grant you wisdom, health and strength to live up to the responsibilities and expectations reposed in you.

Thank you and May God bless Nigeria

**Mahmud Mohammed, GCON**  
**Chief Justice of Nigeria**