

**CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS DELIVERED BY THE HONOURABLE, THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF NIGERIA, HON. JUSTICE MAHMUD MOHAMMED, GCON, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2015 EDITION OF THE DR. FELIX OKOYE MEMORIAL PUBLIC LECTURE, HELD AT THE SHEHU MUSA YAR' ADUA CENTRE, FCT ABUJA, ON 13 OCTOBER 2015 AT 11:00 AM.**

**PROTOCOL**

I am honoured to be called upon by the Management and Staff of the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS) to chair this event. Since its inception, I daresay that the Institute has been at the forefront of valuable research, and academic activities that have immeasurably advanced legal education and enhanced the intellectual capacity of the Legal Profession in Nigeria and I am glad to see that this has not stagnated in the 36 years of its existence. Indeed, it is to the credit of the Management that the Institute has creditably advanced its avowed vision of providing a world class facility, which will be a leading light in legal scholarship in Africa. For this the Management and Staff must be duly commended.

I must also extend my profound gratitude to the family of the late Dr. Felix Okoye for their collaboration in this event as they strive to keep alive his memory and fill the big intellectual vacuum his demise has left in the profession.

A man of outstanding knowledge and learning, Dr. Felix Okoye was unique in his generation given his uncommon command of the Law and his liberality in bestowing its rich virtues and ethics upon young, eager and idealistic lawyers that had the fortune of passing through his formal and informal tutelage. As a doyen of learning, Dr. Okoye also embodied fairness, impartiality, and moral stamina in the face of the storm of corruption, uncommon attributes which today still guides practitioners of Law in the same manner that it did for him in days past. Although he is no longer with us in substance, he is with us in his works, which we celebrate and remember today.

This legacy is also reflected in the theme of this annual lecture, which is “*Open Government and Accountability*”. As the topic suggests, Open Government denotes transparency, which posits that citizens have the right to access information on the workings of the government in order to allow for effective public oversight, thus reducing the avenues for government corruption, bribery and other malfeasance.

I observe that democracy is best practiced where there are clear rules governing the affairs of men, which are not only fair, equal, and accessible but will also promote the openness, without which a country’s government cannot be truly accountable to its citizens. We must also accept the truism that a democracy, no matter how liberal, cannot be said to be practising an open and transparent Government without respect for human rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen, accountability and openness are a *sine qua non* as accountability is the air that the Rule of Law breathes. Without the fundamental accountability of all citizens to the Law, the Rule of Law would surely fail.

That is why this Lecture is a key platform for stakeholders such as Government Agencies, the Judiciary and other members of civil society such as Non-Governmental Organizations, to dialogue on veritable means to maintain an open and transparent Government. This includes being more responsive to the requirements of its citizens to open information under the ***Freedom of Information Act 2011 (FOI Act)***.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, we must all strive to commonly enshrine the principles of openness into the fabric of our polity and I believe that this discourse will help engage our minds further in this direction.

I wish to once again thank the Organizers of this Lecture- the Management and Staff of NIALS, the Okoye Family and indeed the Special Guest Speaker, Dr. Faith Pansy Tlakula, whom I know to be an erudite and circumspect scholar, a woman of great distinction in service and also an experienced human rights campaigner.

Dr. Tlakula is not only the AU’s *Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa*, but is also a highly experienced Advocate of the Supreme Court of South Africa, an administrator, human rights advocate

and an internationally renowned public servant. The Presenter's commitment to human rights was established when Dr. Tlakula became one of the first Commissioners of the South African Human Rights Commission in 1995, being part of a formidable team that birthed the process of reconciliation in the country post-Apartheid, before departing in 2002.

Dr. Faith Pansy Tlakula holds the distinction of being the first female Chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa, occupying one of the most envied yet perhaps the most challenging positions in the South African polity.

In academia, Dr. Tlakula is the Chairperson of the Governing Council at the University of North-West, in South Africa, as well as being the Chancellor of the prestigious Vaal University of Technology, the first woman to hold this position.

Dr. Tlakula is a valuable member of the board of eminent companies registered under the South Africa Stock Exchange, further underlying the demand for this remarkable lady's rare attributes as an able bureaucrat.

It is therefore safe to say that Dr. Tlakula's reputation speaks for itself and the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies could scarcely have invited anyone better qualified to discourse on the topic of Open Government and Accountability, having been both an advocate for these aspirations as well as the administrator who strives to see to it that they are enshrined in the processes of governance in South Africa.

I therefore urge us all to avail ourselves of this rare opportunity by paying rapt attention to the Presenter's lecture and participating actively in the interactive session that follows the presentation.

Thank you all and God bless Nigeria

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