

KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE HONOURABLE, THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF NIGERIA & CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE NATIONAL JUDICIAL INSTITUTE, HON. JUSTICE MAHMUD MOHAMMED, GCON, *FNJI*, ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING CEREMONY FOR THE 2016 REFRESHER COURSE FOR SECRETARIES, PROTOCOL OFFICERS, COURT REGISTRARS, PROCESS CLERKS AND BAILIFFS, HELD ON 9-13 MAY 2016, AT THE ANDREWS OTUTU OBASEKI AUDITORIUM, NATIONAL JUDICIAL INSTITUTE, MOHAMMED BELLO CENTRE, ABUJA.

PROTOCOL

It is certainly an honour to welcome you all to the opening ceremony of the **2016 Refresher Course for Secretaries, Protocol Officers, Court Registrars, Process Clerks and Bailiffs.**

The Refresher Course is organized by the National Judicial Institute in fulfilment of its statutory mandate to provide knowledge for excellence in the performance of our duties as members of the Nigerian Judiciary. The Course similarly aims to deepen the capacity and develop the skill-set and competence of integral officers of Court. As the lynchpin that holds together the fabric of the Nigerian Judiciary, this Course will no doubt assist you in meeting your responsibility while equipping you with the necessary knowledge and skill to enable you perform your duties more professionally and effectively.

The theme of this year's Refresher Course, "Building Capacity of Court Employees for Optimum Performance", aptly and eloquently summarizes our purpose in unmistakable terms given your different, yet equally pivotal roles within the Judiciary.

Though you may be burdened by several inadequacies, you have continued to labour in the boiler room of the Judiciary, oiling its wheels and keeping the engine of justice turning purposefully, so as to facilitate the smooth administration and dispensation of justice. I must commend all Secretaries, Protocol Officers, Court Registrars, Process Clerks and Bailiffs, those present and those in absentia. Indeed, it would not be flattery to state that our Judiciary cannot run smoothly without your services. Your critical job descriptions, range from record keeping, issuance and service of administrative processes, execution and enforcement of court orders, coordination of court events, management of court archives and exhibits, but to name a few. As such, your cadre of staff has, perhaps more than any other, enormous responsibilities within our Courts. Your capacity must therefore be regularly developed to better position you for optimal and efficient discharge of your duties.

It bears reminding that in a modern judicial system, you are the first point of contact that the average court user will have with the Courts. You all give the Nigerian Judiciary's first impression. The way and manner that you conduct yourselves in the discharge of your duties will inevitably colour the perception of the court user and impact upon the quality of service provided and ultimately public confidence in the Judiciary. This is why the display of exemplary conduct by court employees is essential as this will serve as a key indicator of our performance and the satisfaction of court users.

The 21st Century now affords us several tools that can assist us in the performance of our duties. These include electronic equipment and software, which speed up justice delivery. As key staff of the Judiciary involved in the use of such multifaceted IT solutions, I would counsel you to become proficient in the use of Information and Communications Technology, as the Judiciary is not lagging behind in the implementation of court automation. Some or most of you will have heard of the development of the Nigerian Case

Management System (NCMS), which is our own specially designed case management system that was developed in partnership with the National Centre for State Courts and TATA International. This innovation is receiving enthusiastic reviews internationally and is currently utilized at the Supreme Court of Nigeria, with plans for nationwide replication on a phased basis. Your skill set must therefore be sharpened to be compliant with the change that is being undertaken by the leadership of the Judiciary as you will be the core

users of these various initiatives. That said, the improvement of your skill-set must be accompanied by a similar improvement in your ethical content and moral rectitude.

As Judicial Staff, you are enjoined by law to exude absolute integrity in the way and manner you relate with the public in the course of discharging your official duties. It is important that you act in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Court Employees and I urge you all to abide by the principles inherent in the Code, while desisting from any act that violate these rules. You should undertake your functions impartially and avoid unhelpful and illegal

considerations or discrimination. You must be aware of the delicate position you occupy and the responsibilities that go with it. Consequently, you must strive to protect the public interest, act with objectivity and keep official documents in your possession, confidential. At all times it is important to be courteous and selfless in rendering services without fear or favour, noting that the court is like a market place, if you throw a stone, it may hit someone you know. Therefore at all times, perform your duties efficiently, impartially and honestly.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, the importance of discipline to the optimal discharge of your duties cannot be over-emphasized. As you may have read in various media portals over the years, our Courts have become labelled as havens of apathy, with a decline in staff discipline as well as the exhibition of poor attitude to

work, and persistent absenteeism from the office for no just reason. A concurrent and overlapping criticism that is also often voiced by members of the public is that Judicial Staff solicit for funds from lawyers or court users, to carry out their duties.

More worrisome is the allegation that our Court Staff disclose confidential information received in the course of their duties and destroy or conceal evidence in cases pending in court. Similarly, some have even presented themselves as persons capable of influencing the decisions of the court. Corrupt practices such as these should not exist in the Judiciary and will not be tolerated where such practices exist. You must shun corruption in all its ramifications as it erodes public confidence in the Judiciary's ability to impartially dispense justice and bring disrepute to the institution that we hold dear. Let me be firm in stating here that, though good and hard working staff among you will continue to be encouraged and rewarded, those that exhibit bad character, perpetuate corruption or act in a like manner, will surely be dealt with appropriately.

Distinguished Participants, I must also caution you as Secretaries, Protocol Officers, Court Registrars, Process Clerks and Bailiffs, that your functions are interwoven with those of our Judicial Officers. You must therefore be proactive in the discharge of your duties and ensure proper coordination among your various offices in order to prevent delays in the dispensation of justice, while working together to maintain public confidence in the Judiciary. There should be no hiding of files. There should be no rumour peddling. There should be no acrimony or disaffection. We must serve our fatherland with our "heart and might" and defend our Judiciary's unity, integrity and honour, so help us God.

I have had the privilege of going through the programme of this year's Refresher Course and I am convinced that the topics slated for discussion are insightful, apt and germane. They are also relevant, being premised

squarely upon the theme of the Course for the Participants' benefit.

I am similarly impressed by the calibre of the Chairmen of Sessions and Resource Persons, who have been carefully selected to deliver upon their chosen areas of specialty. Permit me at this juncture to thank the Chairmen of Sessions, Resource Persons for affording us the chance to tap from their vine of experience and expertise. I have no doubt in my mind they will do justice to the topics assigned to them and I call upon our distinguished participants to take full advantage of this great opportunity to improve yourselves, by listening attentively, participating actively and contributing meaningfully during the interactive sessions. I expect that where you avidly take part in the Course, you will benefit immensely in a manner that positively impacts your various courts specifically as well as the justice system at large.

My Lords, Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to also express our appreciation to the members of the press and all other persons who have in one way or the other, contributed to making this event a success.

I also wish to acknowledge the high standards which the National Judicial Institute, under the able leadership of Hon. Justice R.P.I Bozimo, OFR, has consistently displayed in performing its statutory mandate.

Having rendered a few remarks to you all, it is now my singular privilege to formally declare the 2016 Refresher Course for Secretaries, Protocol Officers, Court Registrars, Process Clerks and Bailiffs, on "Building Capacity of Court Employees for Optimum Performance", Open.

I thank you all for your attention and wish you all fruitful and rewarding deliberations, as well as a pleasant time during your stay in our Nation's capital city.

May Almighty God bless all of us.

Mahmud Mohammed, GCON, FNJI
Chief Justice of Nigeria and Chairman
Board of Governors; National Judicial Institute