

REMARKS DELIVERED BY THE HONOURABLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF NIGERIA, HON. JUSTICE MAHMUD MOHAMMED, GCON, ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION'S "STAMP FOR LAWYERS", HELD AT THE TRANSCORP HILTON HOTEL, ABUJA, ON 15 APRIL 2015.

PROTOCOL

Let me begin by expressing my appreciation to the President of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Mr. Augustine Alegeh, SAN, and the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Bar for the invitation extended to me to attend this event and the opportunity to make a few remarks. As always, it is an honour to be in the midst of one's own professional colleagues, more so when it is to celebrate another milestone in the profession, which in this case is the launch of the NBA "**Stamp for Lawyers**".

This launch celebrates the welcome actualization of a long held aspiration of the Bar for which the President, NEC, and indeed predecessors in office, should be applauded and commended.

To contextualize this innovation, a key role of the NBA is the regulation of its members' identities through various means of identification. Indeed the significance of this event is underpinned by the provision of Rule 10 (1) of the Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners 2007. This rule mandates that a lawyer acting in his or her

capacity as a legal practitioner, legal officer or adviser of any government department or corporation, shall not sign or file a legal document unless his stamp and seal are affixed on any such document. The Stamp we are here to launch today has breathed life into this provision and further elevated legal practice in Nigeria to meet the challenges of an evolving society.

No doubt, one of these challenges is how to differentiate between a “*real*” and “*fake*” legal practitioner. The prevalence of fake lawyers in the country negatively affects the integrity of the legal profession and casts a shadow of disrepute upon us all. Indeed, Judges find it difficult to identify which counsel, appearing before them, is genuine or otherwise. Of even greater concern is the fact that members of the public are often left in a quandary over who they can place their trust, property and even lives in.

We must not forget that the credibility of the Bar has a direct impact on respect for the Rule of Law and the independence of the Courts. This is why it is our collective responsibility to ensure that the stamp is used as a veritable means of authenticating a qualified legal practitioner and the documents emanating from him. I believe that the stamp can, if properly deployed, become a hallmark of a firm’s work and a way for prospective clients to better identify their counsel- a veritable means to “**Know Your Counsel**”. Thus, having an innovation, which may bestow a “stamp” of integrity and respect, is indeed welcome.

This event is also timely in its occurrence. Our Judiciary is similarly introducing the greater use of information and

communications technology solutions like legal email and court automation into the administration of justice in the tri-strata of our Superior Courts. I believe that an enhanced synergistic use and adoption of appropriate ICT innovations will further enhance our ability to bring the legal profession into the 21st century and re-position the temple of justice to provide effectively a qualitative justice dispensation system that meets the complex demands of our dynamic society. These innovations will soon include the electronic service of hearing notices from the Supreme Court and more secure inter- and intra- communications platforms between the Courts and Legal Practitioners.

My lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am confident in the ability of the leadership of the NBA to sustain and engage all members of the Bar in this initiative. However, I urge the NEC of the Bar to ensure that a proper management structure is established to administer the scheme, as this will enhance the confidence of the users, while also reducing the avenues wherein fraudulent misuse may be occasioned.

I wish the President and Members of the Nigerian Bar Association all the best in this endeavour and I once again congratulate the NBA on this innovation.

Thank you.

Mahmud Mohammed, *GCON*
Chief Justice of Nigeria