

**SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE, THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF NIGERIA,  
HON. JUSTICE MAHMUD MOHAMMED, GCON, ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE VALEDICTORY SITTING FOR HONOURABLE JUSTICE  
SAIFULLAHI MUNTAKA-COOMASSIE, JSC, CFR, AT THE MAIN  
COURT, SUPREME COURT OF NIGERIA, ON 10 FEBRUARY 2016**

**PROTOCOL LIST**

- My lords, Justices of the Supreme Court,
- My lords, The President and Justices of the Court of Appeal,
- My lords Chief Judges of the Federal and State High Courts,
- My lords, Heads of other Superior Courts of Record,
- Hon. Judges of various Jurisdictions,
- The Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice
- Members of the National Judicial Council, the Federal Judicial Service Commission and the National Judicial Institute,
- The Solicitor-General of the Federation and Permanent Secretary,
- Federal Ministry of Justice,
- Our Royal Fathers,
- Senior Advocates of Nigeria,
- Members of the Body of Benchers,
- Learned Members of the Bar,
- Members of the Press
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I must express gratitude to the Almighty Allah for this day as we all gather at this Special Court Session to congratulate our Brother Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria, Hon. Justice Saifullahi Muntaka-Coomassie, *JSC/ CON/ CFR/* on the successful completion of decades of dedicated, selfless service to this Nation and to wish him a well deserved retirement from the Bench of this Court.

When reality dawned on me that my lord, Hon. Justice Muntaka- Coomassie, *JSC*, would be retiring after thirty-eight years of meritorious service to the Judiciary, I was sadly moved but philosophical, safe in the knowledge that his lordship served this

Nation with great distinction.

I would be the first to admit that a mere thirty minutes or even several hours, is inadequate to do justice to an exposition of his lordship's career. However, I shall attempt to highlight some of the more defining and poignant moments of the illustrious career of one of the denizens of our Court, Hon. Justice Muntaka-Coomassie.

My lord Hon. Justice Muntaka Coomassie, *JSC, CON, CFR*, was born on 10 February 1946 in Zaria, Kaduna State. Hon. Justice Muntaka Coomassie initially trained to be a teacher and taught Arabic and English in Kaduna and Zaria before voluntarily bowing out of the teaching profession as the Principal of Provincial Arabic School in Fada, Zaria, Kaduna State, after a decade spent in the profession.

He went on to obtain his Law degree (LL.B) in 1976 from the prestigious Ahmadu Bello University, and was called to the Nigerian Bar; after attending the Nigerian Law School; Lagos in 1977. His lordship, following time honoured tradition along with

most of us, was a State Counsel, serving creditably at the Ministry of Justice in Kwara State (1977 to 1978), and Kaduna State (1978). Between 1978 and 1988, he worked

with the High Court, Kaduna State in various capacities; initially as a Magistrate (Grade II), in the Saminaka Magisterial District in August 1978, then as a Senior Magistrate, a Chief Magistrate in 1981, Deputy Chief Registrar of the High Court of Kaduna State in 1986, and finally as the Chief Registrar, High Court of Justice, Kaduna State in 1987.

Prior to his elevation to the Supreme Court of Nigeria in 2008, his lordship was at the Court of Appeal, serving in Port Harcourt, Jos, Abuja, Ilorin, and Benin Divisions. Hitherto, he was a Judge of the Kaduna State High Court having been appointed to the Bench in November 1988.

In recognition of his commitment to the ends of Justice and the Rule of Law, his lordship was the proud recipient of the Time News Magazine Nigeria Merit Award in 2006. In service of his country, he was a member of the Karibi-Whyte Disturbance Tribunal, Abuja (1986-1987), serving creditably in this capacity. Sequel to attending the Commonwealth Magistrates Conference as part of the Nigerian Delegation in September 1979, my lord, Hon. Justice Muntaka-Coomassie has also proven to be a well rounded jurist, having attended numerous other workshops and seminars in diverse areas of the law. This noble jurist is also a member of the Nigerian Body of Benchers, and a life Bencher, a hallmark of his distinction at the Bench. Suffice it to say that we were all illuminated by many Judgments, which his lordship gave in the course of a rich career in this Court and I daresay that his distinguished career has not been in vain.

My learned Brother, you have enriched us greatly with your contribution to the jurisprudence of the nation's Judiciary and we shall continue to be grateful to the Almighty and to your good self for this privilege. Your lordship has demonstrated a rare quality of chivalry and I know that you have lent a compassionate ear to several quandaries faced by many of us, whether jurisprudential or personal. I have

often known you to be an eternal optimist and regardless of the situation we faced, you were always on hand to make many a tough day brighter.

Your Lordship is an inspiration and a role model to younger Jurists in comportment and decorum. I can only hope that successive Justices of the Supreme Court will also imbibe the same sense of duty, which you have consistently demonstrated.

My lords, Invited Guests; distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen; I make bold to declare that the qualities of conscience and duty are essential to the functioning of our Judiciary. As Thomas Aquinas succinctly stated almost eight centuries ago, ***“every Judgment of conscience, be it right or wrong, be it about things evil in themselves or morally Indifferent, is obligatory... he who acts against his conscience always sins”***. The Nigerian Judiciary, though constantly striving to redress wrongs and tilt the balance in favour of that which is right, has recently had to face the backlash of misguided opinions fashioned without due consideration of the law and rationale for the system of Government that we operate. The Judiciary is duty bound to act in accordance with the dictates of the law as it stands and not as our critics would like it to be. In this sense, naive idealism is but a pale imitation of legal certainty and it is in observing the career and jurisprudence of such eminent jurists as my lord Hon. Justice Muntaka-Coomassie that we see this most clearly.

Today I am sure your lordship will be on the receiving end of our congratulations and many farewells. My lord Muntaka- Coomassie is starting out on a new adventure and as American writer Harry Emerson Fosdick advises, one should not ***“simply retire from something; have something to retire to.”*** Hopefully you will now have more time for your family and to catch up with old friends. I am also sure that it will be great to lie in bed till any chosen hour on a Monday morning.

Life, though, is full of challenges and my lord Muntaka- Coomassie could never resist a challenge. So I am quite sure that he will soon be doing something new and exciting particularly in embarking on research into the development of Sharia. I am also sure

that he will develop new hobbies or skills and find satisfaction and enjoyment in so doing. Nonetheless, whatever my lord Muntaka-Coomassie chooses to do, we hope that he will enjoy good health and happiness. We hope too that he will have happy memories of his years as a Judge and that those memories will be sweetened with the satisfaction of the knowledge that he performed well, fought the good fight and ran a good race.

I would like to extend sincere appreciation to the family of Hon. Justice Muntaka-Coomassie, JSC. Indeed they have borne the proverbial burden as my lord has traversed the Nation on official duty to his Country. I wish to thank you for your patience, stamina and the care, which meant that his lordship was as fit as a fiddle and always jovial in Chambers. Behind every successful man is a stable home and it is this stability that has allowed his lordship to thrive for all these years. In this sense, your Country owes you a debt of gratitude.

On behalf of the Nigerian Judiciary, well wishers, and distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I once again extend our profound gratitude to your Lordship for your immeasurable and invaluable contribution to the Judiciary, Government and People of Nigeria. We wish your Lordship a long and peaceful retirement and we are confident that you will always stand ready to answer whenever your dear Nation calls.

I pray that the Almighty Allah shall grant you a retirement of ease, continue to be with you and grant you strength and health for the rest of your days.

Thank you and May God bless all of us.

**Mahmud Mohammed, GCON**

