

ADDRESS ON BEHALF OF THE 2016 NEW
SENIOR ADVOCATES OF NIGERIA

- By Olanrewaju Adesola Onadeko S.A.N.

My Lord, The Chief Justice of Nigeria, Hon. Justice Mahmud Mohammed,
O.F.R., CO.N., G.C.O.N.;

My Lords, Justices of the Supreme Court;

The Hon. Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice;

The President of the Nigerian Bar Association;

My Learned Friends of the Inner Bar;

My Learned Friends of the Utter Bar;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

In humility, I rise on behalf of the new Senior Advocates of Nigeria to present this address of acceptance. I am very grateful to My Lord, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, who had kindly extended the invitation to me to address this assemblage, at this auspicious occasion, with the Supreme Court fittingly sitting *in banc* in this resplendent hallowed Chambers. His Lordship's "order," having been delivered to me in my office, left me with no other option than an immediate silent response of: "As Your Lordship pleases". Today's event is a memorable one, for which we are all deeply grateful to God Almighty.

My colleagues and I profoundly appreciate the kind consideration of the Legal Practitioners Privileges Committee (LP.P.C.), under the able leadership of the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Hon. Justice Mahmud Mohammed, O.F.R., C.O.N., G.C.O.N.) at being conferred with the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria. The attainment of admission to the Inner Bar, by members of our own profession, is a special recognition of our humble endeavors in craving for excellence at the Bar. We consider ourselves truly privileged by this honor. Our profession the legal profession is in transition, in great leaps. The challenges are manifold and at times complex. it is therefore imperative that the Bench and the Bar must move in synergy; and in the right direction.

My Lords, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to commend the efforts of My Lord, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, in advancing the course of the administration of justice in the country. Of note is the continued deployment of information and communications technology, especially the latest amendment to the Supreme Court Rules, which will make all communications, correspondences and notices related to matters at the Supreme Court, to be by official electronic mail. In consequence, it will be impossible to practice at the Supreme Court and all Superior Courts of Record in due course without the official email. The benefits of this development to our justice landscape will be phenomenal.

Permit me, to also commend My Lord The Chief Justice, in the timeous resolution of cases affecting Judicial Officers, coming before the National Judicial Council. This practice has done a lot in enhancing public confidence in matters pertaining to the discipline of Judges and the administration of justice generally. While it is appreciated that a lot still has to be done generally, it is clear that with the current momentum, the future of the institution revered by all as the last hope of the common man -- the judiciary; is very bright.

The current absence of any form of structured pupillage, for new entrants into the Legal Profession, has been cause for concern. As things are, a new wig may on enrolment set up his practice and function as a full-fledged Legal Practitioner, practically from the precincts of the Nigerian Law School. The reality is that the new wig requires additional and invaluable work experience, under the supervision of a senior colleague.

The aim of pupillage is not to elongate the duration of formal legal training of new Lawyers. It is essentially to avail them of a period of hands-on apprenticeship in law establishments, for a total comprehension of law practice.

There have been well reasoned arguments for and against the scheme, but its effective relevance in a number of jurisdictions, with attendant benefits, may be the compelling basis for a revisit of the whole scheme here at home.

Another source for concern for our profession, is the ever increasing number of new Law Faculties as approved by the National Universities Commission (N.U.C). This should not ordinarily attract any comment, because it is a normal expectation to view advancement from the perspective of increase. What has been troubling is the absence of discernible effort, at putting in place the components of support for expansion, in terms of manpower growth.

It is my view that, the Body of Benchers and the Council of Legal Education should take a holistic look at legal education and national manpower needs for Lawyers. There should be a correlation between the requirement for the services of Lawyers and the number of Lawyers being licensed, to sustain quality and ensure meaningful growth. An indirect connection is the concern about waning personal character and integrity in some of our members. This has been a subject of national discourse of recent. Our noble profession must rise firmly and restore its dignity and beauty, as bequeathed to us by our progenitors.

An unwelcome practice, which was believed to be in decline, is again rearing its head without restraint. I am, My Lords, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, referring to the practice of Lawyers addressing the press, with their slant of what transpired in court after each hearing. The late Hon. Justice C. A. Oputa, former Justice of the Supreme Court, in his book: Modern Bar Advocacy (1973 at page 6), admonished that: "Counsel should never express his personal view, confidence or conviction in his case. Such a course is unnecessary, irregular and fraught with danger. Counsel is not usually called upon to vouch for his case; he is called upon to argue his case. The duty of an advocate should be to press his argument upon the court, not his opinion". I strongly commend these words to all Legal Practitioners at all times please.

This practice had been deprecated by the Leadership of the Nigerian Bar Association (N.B.A.) on several occasions. I will take this opportunity to implore our new President, Mr. A. B. Mahmud, O.O.N., SAN, to kindly take up the matter with a view to ensuring that all Lawyers fall in line with what should be.

On behalf of my Brothers new Silks, we promise and are determined to uphold and positively advance the ethics and ethos of our profession, from the Inner Bar, mindful of the privileges that attach to our newly conferred status; and the responsibilities and duties that go with it. I wish to thank most heartily, our learned “senior” silks for so warmly and willingly embracing us into their esteemed fold at the Inner Bar. We assure you most sincerely that we shall never be privy to any attitude or behavior that will denigrate your esteemed body.

Our award of the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria, came in the tenure of the immediate past President of the N.B.A., Mr. Augustine Alegeh, S.A.N., whom I am certain is enjoying a well deserved vacation after a hectic and successful term. His administration brought in innovations including, the endowment of the long awaited N.B.A. prizes for the best performing students at the Bar final examinations and of course, electronic voting at N.B.A. elections, which still needs to be improved upon. We wish him every success in the future. The association today has a new leader, to whom I had earlier referred. On behalf of the new Senior Advocates of Nigeria, I wish Mr. A. B. Mahmud, O.O.N., S.A.N. a successful tenure in office. We also implore our colleagues of the noble profession to steadfastly join hands with the Federal Government, in its efforts at revamping our economy and in the fight against corruption.

I must express words of appreciation to My Lords, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justices of the Supreme Court, the President and Justices of the Court of Appeal, as well as Chief Judges and Judges of the various High Courts for their commitment and diligence even under trying conditions. The erudition of Your Lordships’ judgments transcend the boundaries of our country; and it is a matter of pride that your opinions assist in shaping the jurisprudence of sister African countries and even beyond. Needless to say, you are a part of our’ attainment and joy today. We wish you abundant blessings from God in your endeavors.

Conclusion:

I congratulate my Brothers, the new Senior Advocates of Nigeria on the attainment of the coveted honor bestowed on us by the Legal Practitioners Privileges Committee.

On your behalf, I make the unreserved declaration that we shall at all times uphold the dignity of our new status, by our conduct and comporment. We shall also strive to be adequate role models for juniors.

To the members of our families and numerous friends and well wishers, we thank you for your love and support. We thank you for standing by.

Finally, we thank God Almighty, for making today a reality.

We wish you all God's abundant blessings and safe journey back home.

God bless the Judiciary,
God bless our noble profession of Law,
God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
I thank you for listening.

Olanrewaju Adesola Onadeko, S.A.N.
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