



NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

BODY OF CHAIRMEN RIVERS STATE

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JOINT PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE 8 (EIGHT) BRANCHES OF THE NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION IN RIVERS STATE ON THE PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY SIR. CHIEF TONY C. OKOCHA AGAINST HON. JUSTICE S. H. APRIOKU OF THE HIGH COURT OF RIVERS STATE HELD ON THE 20TH OF AUGUST 2024

Good morning, ladies and Gentlemen of the Press, my name is Mrs. Cordelia Uwuma Eke, the Chairman of Port Harcourt Branch of the Nigerian Bar Association, and with me here are my Brother Chairmen of the other 7 (Seven) Branches in Rivers State. The attention of the leadership of the Nigerian Bar Association in Rivers State has been drawn to a very distasteful press briefing and news report circulated via the electronic and social media by Chief Tony C. Okocha, JP, DSSRS (hereinafter referred to as the Petitioner), against the Hon. Justice S. H Aprioku, Judge of the High Court of Rivers State. In the report, Chief Tony C. Okocha made unsubstantiated allegations that the judge was bribed and, as a result, he became biased against the Defendants in **Suit No: PHC/3592/CS/2023: SAM SAM ETETEGWUNG V. HIS EXCELLENCY, ABDULLAHI GANDUJE & ORS.** and other matters pending before the Judge.

The Nigerian Bar Association cannot in all sense of responsibility ignore such a blatant affront to the judicial system and the legal profession in general by the unfounded labeling of a Judge as a bribe-taker. In view of the above, the Chairmen of the 8 (Eight) Branches of the Nigerian Bar Association in Rivers State hereby respond to this state of affairs as follows:

1. From verifiable and ascertainable facts available to us, it is noteworthy that upon an application by the National Legal Adviser of the All Progressives Congress (A.P.C.), which alleged that Two (2) Learned Judges of the High Court of Rivers State, Hon. Justice C.N Wali and Hon. Justice O. Ollor, who were presiding over three (3) sister cases of the A.P.C. in the State were vehemently opposed to President Bola Ahmed

Tinubu's A.P.C. led Government and the A.P.C. Caretaker Committee in Rivers State. Following this allegation, the said cases were consolidated and re-assigned to the Hon. Justice S. H. Aprioku. Interestingly, the Petitioner, Chief Tony C. Okocha again raised an objection against the Judge to whom the matters were reassigned, citing the same reasons for earlier seeking the re-assignment of the cases.

2. We state categorically, that litigants cannot pick and choose which Judge a matter should be assigned to, nor can they cast aspersions on Judges just to have their way, as that would amount to forum shopping and lead to a chaotic judicial system. A mere allegation of a likelihood of bias, based on conjecture, assumptions and suppositions without more, cannot suffice to cause a case to be reassigned from one Judge to another. Any allegation of bribery against a judge must be founded on incontrovertible evidence, not hearsay, as it has grave implications for the image of the Judiciary and erode public trust and confidence in the Judicial system. Such unfounded allegation is contemptible and it is actionable in law.
3. We also condemn the wanton and reckless disparagement of the Learned Hon. Justice S.H. Aprioku by the Petitioner, Chief Tony C. Okocha, describing him as being in the "monotonous alternative habit of criticizing the A.P.C. Caretaker Committee in Rivers State and the Government of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu" and "...being an ardent critic of the State Caretaker Committee of the Party (A.P.C.)." These are spurious and unfounded allegations to be leveled against any Judge without furnishing any particulars to substantiate such claims. The appropriate step for an aggrieved and dissatisfied litigant is to go on Appeal against the Judgement, and not to resort to name calling and the use of abusive words against the person of a Judge.
4. Judges are apolitical and operate by a strict Code of Conduct which shields them from unnecessary interaction with the public. They are therefore not expected to engage in making political pronouncements, but to adjudicate cases brought before them based on the facts and evidence presented by the parties. It is for Counsel in the matters to represent their clients appropriately.
5. We hereby condemn the public statements of the Petitioner, Chief Tony C. Okocha, and call on him to immediately retract his statements denigrating the Judiciary in Rivers State which he referred to as a "supermarket" and tender a public apology to the respected Judges of the High Court of Rivers State, particularly Hon. Justice S. H. Aprioku, Hon. Justice C. N. Wali and Hon. Justice G. O. Ollor, who indeed from all available facts had not taken any steps in the matters pending before them, to warrant the Petitioner's barrage of insults.
6. We also call on all litigants in matters pending before Judges and indeed members of the public to refrain from harassing Judges and redirect their energy and industry to

their cases. It should also be noted that such unfounded comments amount to Contempt *ex facie curiae*.

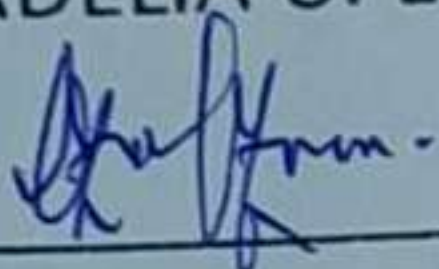
The NBA will continue to stand for due process in the justice delivery system and upholding the Rule of Law and will not hesitate to take legal action where the sanctity of the justice system is desecrated. Thank you.

SIGNED BY



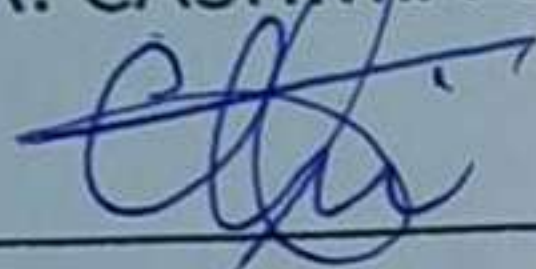
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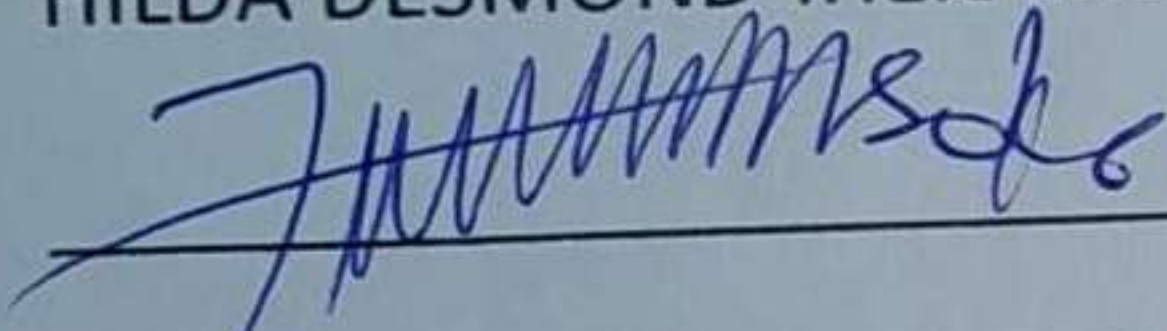
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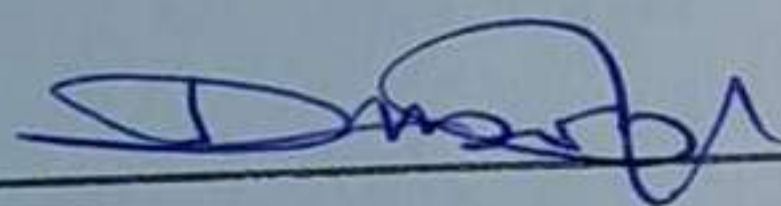
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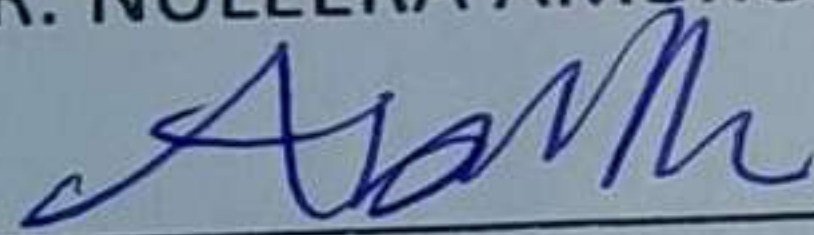
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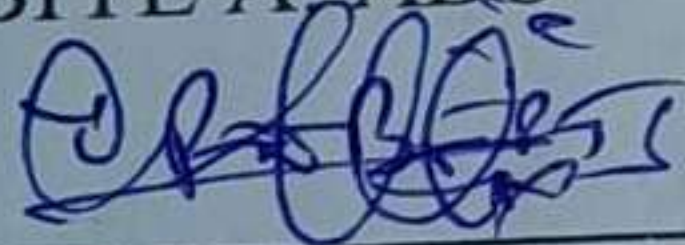
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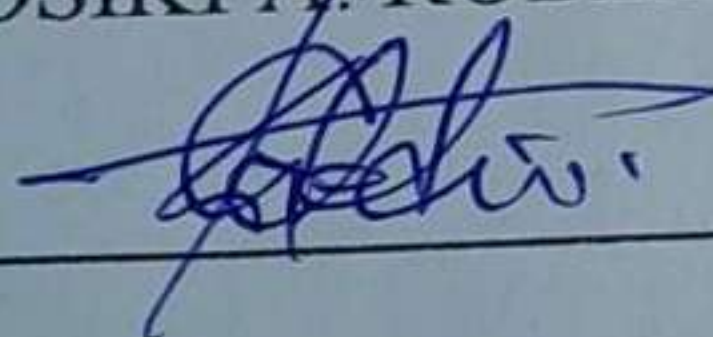
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