

ADDRESS BY HON. JUSTICE OLUKAYODE ARIWOOLA, GCON, LIFE BENCHER, CHAIRMAN, BODY OF BENCHERS AT THE CALL TO BAR CEREMONIES HELD AT THE BODY OF BENCHERS COMPLEX, ABUJA, FROM TUESDAY, 8TH TO 10TH JULY, 2025

PROTOCOL

- The Vice Chairman, Body of Benchers, Olorogun Albert Akpomudje, SAN, Life Bencher
- Past Chairmen of the Body of Benchers here present,
- The Chief Justice of Nigeria, Hon. Justice K.M.O. Kekere-Ekun, GCON
- Former Chief Justices of Nigeria here present
- President of the Court of Appeal, Hon. Justice M.B. Dongban-Mensem, CFR
- Hon. Attorney General of the Federation and Minister for Justice; Prince Lateef O. Fagbemi, SAN, Life Bencher
- Distinguished Life Benchers and Members of the Body of Benchers,
- The Chairman, Council of Legal Education, Chief Emeka Ngige, OFR, SAN
- The President of the Nigerian Bar Association, Mazi Afam Osigwe, SAN
- Honourable Judges and Kadis,
- Distinguished and Honourable Members of the National Assembly,
- Members of the Inner and outer Bar,
- Your Royal Highnesses,
- The New Wigs,
- Proud Parents and Guardians,
- Special Invitees,
- Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this solemn ceremony of the July, 2025 Call to Bar Ceremony which I count as a rare privilege to address you all, being the first call ceremony under my tenure as the Chairman of the Body of Benchers. We give thanks to the Almighty God for sparing our lives in good health to witness this historic event.

Today, we are marking the formal admission of new wigs into this prestigious and noble profession of law; an ancient profession whose members play a central role in the community and are revered by the general public. Therefore, I heartily extend my congratulations to the new wigs for this feat, having been found worthy in character and learning to become members of the legal profession in Nigeria.

The success you have achieved today is a hallmark of your hard work, academic prowess, divine favor from God Almighty and the invaluable support of your parents, guardians and friends.

I commend the Chairman, Council of Legal Education, Chief Emeka Ngige, OFR, SAN, Life Bencher and the Director General of the Nigerian Law School Prof. Isa Chiroma, SAN, Life Bencher, and his excellent team of academic and non-academic staff for their commitment in training the new wigs and equipping them with the essential knowledge and expertise required to be successful lawyers.

In the same vein, I wish to also commend the distinguished members of the Body of Benchers for making this day possible and the vital role the Body play in upholding the core values of the legal profession. The Body of Benchers over the years have remained steadfast in carrying out her mandate and ensuring that only fit and proper aspirants are admitted into the Nigerian Bar.

To the parents, guardians and well-wishers, I believe you are full of enthusiasm as your perseverance, prayers and support was not in vain. Therefore, I extend my congratulations to you as well.

My brand-new learned friends, it is pertinent at this juncture for me to draw your attention to some salient points which will serve as a useful guide as you commence your sojourn into the Legal Profession.

Your Call to the Bar today is not just a crown to your efforts but a noble call to service. Along with the prestige of being a lawyer, come many responsibilities. Chief among these responsibilities is the duty to serve the public ethically and diligently. As a lawyer, you are an officer of the Court and accordingly, you are not to do any act or conduct yourself in a manner that will obstruct or adversely affect the course of justice. You must therefore, strictly adhere to the provisions of the Rules of Professional Conduct which is a set of ethical guidelines binding on every Lawyer in Nigeria.

Today, you have become Ministers in the temple of justice, and you owe the courts a duty as such. These duties include; duty to assist the court in attaining justice, duty to maintain respect and dignity, duty to ensure civil conduct, duty to be punctual and diligent, duty to avoid misleading the court and duty to uphold the rule of law.

Your duty as a professional further extends to your fellow counsel and colleagues. Therefore, you must treat them with; respect and courtesy, fairness and integrity, and avoid conflicts of interest regardless of the relationship between their clients.

I must reiterate at this point, that the practice of law is not a right, but a privilege. This privilege can be lost should you fail to live up to the requisite professional standards imposed upon you by the Rules of Professional Conduct. The Body of Benchers have graciously provided you with a copy of the Rules for your digest. I therefore urge you to acquaint yourself with the provisions contained therein and let it always guide you in your practice.

As you may be aware, one of the vital functions of the Body of Benchers is the discipline of erring lawyers. The Body performs this important role through the Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Committee, which is a Committee of the Body of Benchers established by **Section 10 of the Legal Practitioners Act**.

The Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Committee has been carrying out its mandate in a just and fair manner without giving room for compromise, affection or ill-will. From January, 2025, One (1) lawyer was disbarred, seven (7) lawyers were suspended (ranging from six (6) months to five (5) years and four (4) lawyers were found not liable.

You are therefore advised to be of good behavior and abide by the ethics and tradition of the profession to avoid being brought before the Committee.

Another duty which you owe as a Legal Practitioner, is to actively participate in the affairs of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) which is the umbrella body for all Legal Practitioners in Nigeria. I therefore encourage you, as my learned friends to always endeavor to pay your Practice fees on or before the 31st of March yearly as stipulated by **Rule 9** of the Rules of

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Professional Conduct. You are expected to register with any branch of the Association, which is closer to your location of practice that will serve as your local branch.

In furtherance of your professional development, I urge you to take advantage of the many accredited Continuing Legal Education courses and programs of the Nigerian Bar Association in order to meet up with the Mandatory Continuing Professional Development requirement as stipulated by the Mandatory Continuing Professional Development (MCPD) Rules, 2025. I must emphasize that the Mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirement is a stipulation of Law, not just a policy nor a creation of the Nigerian Bar Association. Rule 11(1) of the Rules of Professional Conduct expressly states that a "lawyer who wishes to carry on practice as a Legal Practitioner shall participate in and satisfy the requirements of the Mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program operated by the Nigerian Bar Association.

Therefore, in order to be qualified to be listed on the Annual Practicing List and obtain a certification thereof, you must have paid your Practice fees accordingly for the specified year and complied with the requirement of the Continuing Professional Development Program for the year. In this regard, I commend the Nigerian Bar Association under the leadership of Mazi Afam Osigwe, SAN, Life Bencher for the progressive and empathetic steps taken so far to make compliance easy and accessible especially for young and less-resourced lawyers. Notable amongst which are discounted or waived Continuing Professional Development course fees, multiple and flexible ways to earn Continuing Professional Development credit hours and reducing the required Continuing Professional Development credit hours for all lawyers.

As you enter into the legal profession, I urge you to follow the age long tradition of undergoing pupillage. The process of mentoring is one of the beneficial traditions of our profession which every successful lawyer experienced. You will readily find available experienced colleagues at the Bar who will be more than willing to mentor you and help you learn the ropes of law practice. I encourage you to take advantage of the Body of Benchers Mentoring Program for all young lawyers (0-7 years Post-Call) and other mentoring programs of the Nigerian Bar Association and senior lawyers across the nation. This will enable you imbibe the ethics of the profession and equip you to adequately take charge of the future of the legal profession and become a mentor yourself when the time comes.

We are in a jet-age, where Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Artificial Intelligence is at the front burner. It is not enough that you are aware of the developments in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector, you must be able to maximize its usage and enjoy the attendant benefits to the maximum. I therefore encourage you to adequately equip yourself to harness its full potential for effective Law Practice. Take full advantage of the available legal analytic software's and the internet which has provided a whole range of Legal information and source materials including judgments. With Information Communications Technology and Artificial Intelligence, the world is at your fingertips and you can become a mobile lawyer.

I encourage you to research extensively and continue to update your knowledge of both statute and case law as well as imbibe good understanding of what is obtainable in other jurisdictions outside the shores of the country. In the words of Lord Denning "The Law never stands still; it goes on a pace; you have to run fast to keep up with it. I hope you will manage it"

Kindly, permit me to use this auspicious occasion to congratulate the following members of the Body of Benchers who on the 27th of June, 2025 marked their fiftieth (50th) year of Call to the Nigerian Bar, namely:

1. Hon. Justice Oladode Rhodes-Vivour, CFR
2. Mrs. Funke Adekoya, SAN
3. Hon. Justice Tijjani Abubakar, OFR
4. Hon. Justice B.S. Bansi, OFR
5. Hon. Justice Ibrahim Umar, OFR
6. Hon. Justice K.B. Akaahs, OFR
7. Sen. Mike Ajegbo, CON

I wish them good health and more strength to continue to contribute their quota to the development of the legal profession as always.

Once again, I extend my sincere congratulations to all the new wigs and formally welcome you to the largest Bar in Africa. Always remember how much you have labored in time past and the sacrifices your loved ones have made for you to succeed and strive to exhibit the highest sense of responsibility which the legal profession is renowned for all over the world.

It's a new beginning of your life, it's a brand-new endeavor and I wish you get what you dream for and achieve lots of success, May God bless you with strength and determination and prepare you for the unseen future.

Having achieved this milestone, go chase your dreams, you now have the wings, you are now lawyers.

Chairman's Charge to New Legal Practitioners

In time honoured tradition, I hereby close with the Chairman's charge to our newly called Legal Practitioners.

"YOU MAY NOW GO FORTH IN YOUR NEW WIGS FROM THIS DAY FORWARD TO SERVE NIGERIA AND SERVE HUMANITY IN JUSTICE, WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR, AFFECTION OR ILL WILL."

I thank you for your audience. I pray that God in his infinite mercies will take each and every one of you safe to your respective destinations.

HON. JUSTICE OLUKAYODE ARIWOOLA, GCON
Chairman, Body of Benchers, Life Bencher