



NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT: Plot 1102, Muhammed Buhari Way, Cadastral Zone A00, Central Business District, Abuja Nigerian Tel: +234 800 333 1111
www.nigerianbar.org.ng

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION, MR. YAKUBU CHONOKO MAIKYAU, OON, SAN, TO COMMEMORATE THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE ENDANGERED LAWYER

24 January 2023

The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), today, joins the rest of the global legal community to mark the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer. The day has been commemorated on 24 January every year since 2009, to draw attention to the situations of lawyers in selected countries, to raise awareness about the threats they face in the practice of the legal profession.

The choice of the date is traceable to the 24 January 1977 incident in Madrid, Spain. On the said date, three extreme-right terrorists stormed No. 55 Atocha Street, Madrid, the offices of labour lawyers that were working for the trade union in the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), and opened fire on them. Three legal practitioners, a law student and the administrative assistant in the law firm were killed, while several others were injured.

For this year's observance of the day of the endangered lawyer, the focus of the world legal community is on Afghanistan, where lawyers dedicated to championing human rights in the country are being persecuted and prevented from freely and safely practising their profession. Following the Taliban takeover of administration in Afghanistan in 2021, there have been wide-spread, systematic and encompassing violations of human rights of Afghans. Lawyers, judges, and other actors in the Afghanistan legal system face grave risks in their efforts to protect the rule of law. At the last count, two women judges of the Afghan Supreme Court had been shot dead in Kabul, with many female prosecutors fleeing the country for fear of being attacked or killed.

The Nigerian Bar Association fraternally identifies with our counterparts in Afghanistan in the face of the challenges confronting them. We are concerned that lawyers in Afghanistan can no longer freely and safely practice law as they have become perennial victims of extra-judicial killings. We strongly and unequivocally condemn the repressive tendencies of the Taliban government to criminalize the practice of law and deplore the systemic extermination of Afghan lawyers by allegedly 'unknown individuals.'

The right to a fair and public hearing as guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Afghanistan subscribes having ratified the same, is intertwined with the right to be represented by counsel of one's choice. The current war being waged against legal practitioners is therefore not only criminal, but also a violation of the rights of Afghan people to fair trials.

This persecution of Afghanistan legal practitioners came up for discussion at the last International Bar Association Conference in Miami, Florida in the United States in November 2022. Fleeing Afghan judges and lawyers gave account of their experiences and what currently obtains in Afghanistan in one of the sessions. Their stories are not only pathetic but also call for global support for our colleagues in Afghanistan.

NATIONAL OFFICERS:

Yakubu Chonoko Maikyau, OON, SAN President

Adesina Adegbite, FICMC, General Secretary; Linda R. Bala (Mrs), 1st Vice President; Chukwuemeka Clement Ugo, 2nd Vice President; Amanda Ego Demechi-Asagba, 3rd Vice President; Caroline Ladidi Anze-Bishop, Treasurer; Chinyere Gladys Obasi, Welfare Secretary; Akorede Habeeb Lawal, Publicity Secretary; Daniel K. Kip, Assistant Secretary; Charles Ajiboye, FICMC, FCAI, ACIS Assistant Publicity Secretary

There is no gainsaying that rule of law is the pedestal upon which the civilized society rests, and that lawyers, who are ministers in the sacred temple of justice, are the champions of the rule of law. Any society that cannot guarantee the lives of her lawyers, as well as the lives of other citizens, has lost any claim to civility. We therefore join the rest of the world to call on the Afghan Government to halt the persecution of legal practitioners and other citizens with immediate effect. Every life is sacrosanct!

The Nigerian Bar Association is also using the opportunity of this year's International Day of the Endangered Lawyer to draw the attention of our home government to the sad reality that lawyers in this country are fast becoming an endangered specie. It will be recalled that on 23 December 2001, the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Chief Bola Ige, was murdered in his house at Bodija, Ibadan, Oyo State. A little over two decades later, on 21 November 2022, a member of the NBA Ahoada Branch, Mr Nathan Akatakpo, was killed by unidentified assailants in Rivers State.

We have continued to suffer recurring losses of lawyers, magistrates, and judges through extra-judicial killings, in addition to kidnappings, harassments and molestations we face while performing our duties. We painfully recall the assassination of Barnabas and Abigail Igwe in Onitsha in 2002; Ijeoma Micah who was found mutilated in her law office in Upmarket Maitama in October 2013; Eguno Dafiaghor and Samuel Ekuwangi in Delta State in March 2014; Austin Ichege in April 2015; Sampson Worlu, who was murdered one week after his call to the Bar in 2015; Mary Obe in Alode in 2017; Adeola Adebayo in Ikole-Ekiti in 2018; Emeka Agundu in Enugu in 2018; Frank Okwuachi in Otuocha near Onitsha in 2021; Kenechukwu Okeke in Nkpor, Anambra State in November 2021; Ndionyenma Nwankwo in 2021, Stephen Eke in Karu on 18 November 2022. We also recall the abduction of President, Customary Court of Appeal of Imo State, Justice Ambrose Egu, together with Senior Magistrate Pauline Njemanze in 2010; the abduction of Justice Chioma Iheme-Nwosu, JCA in Benin City, while presiding over election disputes in 2019; and several other lawyers, magistrates and judges who have been abducted, harassed, molested and/or killed in the line of duty.

It is not a crime to be a member of the legal profession – either on the Bench or at the Bar. Every citizen deserves to be accorded the right to life as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, LAWYERS INCLUSIVE. It is important to note that one factor common to almost all the countries which have been chosen as the focus of the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer in the successive years, is their poor score on global human rights and rule of law index. We call on the Nigerian Government and all relevant authorities to put in place practical, proactive, and pragmatic steps to stop extra judicial killing and kidnapping of not only legal practitioners, but all categories of persons in Nigeria.

May God bless members of the legal profession around the world and grant us protection, as we continue to serve as Ministers in the Temple of Justice with integrity, honour and the highest standard of ethics and professional conduct.



Yakubu Chonoko Maikyau, OON, SAN
PRESIDENT