

**ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE HONOURABLE, THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF NIGERIA HON. MR. CHIEF JUSTICE WALTER SAMUEL NKANU ONNOGHEN, GCON, AT THE PUBLIC PRESENTATION OF APEX QUARTERLY MAGAZINE HELD AT SUPREME COURT OF NIGERIA, ABUJA ON 25<sup>TH</sup> APRIL, 2018.**

## **PROTOCOLS**

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the official unveiling of ***Apex Quarterly Magazine***, the premier in-house publication of the Nigerian Judiciary.

This is indeed a milestone achieved in the quest to improve public perception of the Judiciary by the Nigerian public.

At the assumption of office, I unveiled a Reform Agenda that would consolidate on the achievements of my predecessors to make the Nigerian Judiciary one of the best in the world.

One of the reform items was directed at improving the public perception of the Judiciary. I consider the poor public perception of our arm of government a grave

concern that requires special effort to correct by telling the world the true state of things in the Judiciary.

Therefore, as part of the agenda, I had this to say in the reform document which was endorsed by the National Judicial Council (NJC) and the Board of Governors of the National Judicial Institute (NJI):

“Given the spate of unsavoury comments on the National Judicial Council in particular and the Judiciary in general, a more holistic approach to information management will be adopted with a super-structure of responsibilities and hierarchy, with a view to getting the current media departments in the Judiciary to function optimally. The Information Department of the Council will therefore, be restructured to be more proactive so as to, from time to time, project the Council and Judiciary before the public through the media and to assuage the negative and damaging perception’.

I then suggested, and the NJC and the Board of Governors of NJI saw the wisdom in the suggestion, that some enlightenment Judicial programmes be mounted or carried out in the print and electronic media with the

belief that the widespread perception of the Judiciary as an inefficient and corruption-ridden Institution lacking integrity and efficiency in the performance of its functions will be greatly reduced, if not eliminated.

To ensure the success of this initiative, I appointed a Senior Special Assistant with vast experience in media work to coordinate relevant departments and units in Courts and Judicial Institutions to work on improving this perception.

As I have said several times in the past, cautiously opening up the Judiciary to the public helps to change the wrong perception people have of the activities of the Courts. Where people are well informed, incidents of rumours, fake news, false allegations, petitions, among others, are reduced.

And as I have always insisted, we must be in absolute control of our Institutions and Courts as well as what information we put in the public domain. This effort will ensure that we do less of damage control, and more of pro-active dissemination of information.

The ***Apex Quarterly Magazine***, which I will be unveiling presently, is one, but certainly not the only step, taken to show the world what we do in the Judiciary.

Recently, in recognition of the fact that the Supreme Court's website is the first point of contact of the litigation world with the Court, I directed the Chief Registrar of the Court to reconstitute the Court's Website Management Committee to ensure, among other things, that Chamber's Sittings are uploaded on the Site not later than 24 hours after every sitting on Wednesdays.

I also directed that the website should be re-designed to render it compatible with both desktops and handheld devices. In addition, I gave instructions that the Court's Practice Directions should regularly be uploaded and updated while the bio-data of Justices of the Supreme Court and the Cause List should be regularly updated.

In the same vein, I have directed that all judgments and decisions of the Court should be uploaded on the website within seven days of delivery.

The objective of these directives is to, as I said earlier, cautiously open the Judiciary to the public.

I recall that during an interactive session I had with participants at the 2017 All Nigeria Judges' Conference in November 2017, a Judge from one of the Jurisdictions advocated the formation of an Association of Nigerian Judges to speak up for the Judiciary when it is attacked, much like the Nigeria Bar Association does for lawyers, since sitting Judicial Officers cannot grant media interviews. The Honourable Judge's position was that periodic press statements issued after the meetings of the National Judicial Council are too few and far between to make any impact.

My obvious response was an emphatic NO! The mandate of a Judicial Officer is adjudication and not advocacy. However, a publication like the one we are unveiling today will, like all literature, chronicle events of the Judiciary of this era for posterity.

I have personally gone through this maiden edition of the 64-paged ***Apex Quarterly Magazine*** and, though there is room for improvement in subsequent editions, I

am satisfied that it is completely devoid of propaganda. That is how every product of the Judiciary should be - neutral.

I also like the structure and sections of the Magazine. The section titled '**Locus Classicus**', for instance, offers historians and researchers an opportunity to look at some landmark judgments the Supreme Court and other Courts have delivered over the years. In similar manner, the concept of publishing the profiles of Justices of the Supreme Court in this edition, and other Justices of other Superior Courts of Records in subsequent editions, is commendable as it leaves the individual contributions of Judicial Officers in the Superior Courts of Records on the sands of time.

After today's unveiling ceremony, **Apex Quarterly Magazine** will be distributed to every Jurisdiction in the country and I encourage all Heads of Courts to put their Information Units to good use by directing them to make contribution to the editorial content of subsequent editions of the Magazine.

On behalf of the Judiciary, I thank the Editorial Board led by my Senior Special Assistant on Media, Mr. Awassam Bassey, for this enviable milestone.

It is now my singular honour and privilege to invite My Lords, the Honourable Justices of the Supreme Court; the Attorney General of the Federation or his representative, the President of the Court of Appeal, the Acting Chief Judge of the Federal High Court, the Chief Judge of Borno State, the President of the Nigerian Bar Association and other distinguished persons here present, to join me to formally unveil the ***Apex Quarterly Magazine***.

Thank you and May the Almighty God bless us all.  
Amen

**Hon. Mr. Justice Walter Samuel Nkanu Onnoghen,  
GCON  
Chief Justice of Nigeria and Chairman, National  
Judicial Council**