

KEY NOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE HONOURABLE, THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF NIGERIA AND CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE NATIONAL JUDICIAL INSTITUTE, HYON, MR. JUSTICE W.S.N. ONNOGHEN, GCON, FNJI, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 2018 REFRESHERS COURSE FOR MAGISTRATES, HELD AT THE ANDREWS OTUTU OBASEKI AUDITORIUM, NATIONAL JUDICIAL INSTITUTE, ABUJA ON 16TH APRIL, 2018.

PROTOCOL

It gives me great pleasure to address you on this auspicious occasion of the **2018 Refresher Course for Magistrates**, organised by the National Judicial Institute, Abuja. This Course is designed by the Education Committee of the National Judicial Institute to strengthen the capacity of Magistrate Courts in Nigeria.

The theme “ **PROMOTING EXCELLENCE IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE IN THE LOWER COURTS**” is deliberately embedded to capture the essence of the course, which is the renewal of the culture of excellence and create avenue for Magistrates from different jurisdictions to exchange ideas and enhance their professional skills.

Let me begin by commending our distinguished participants for their commitment and hard work. No doubt, the Magistracy occupies an important position in the architecture of the Nigerian Judiciary as it plays a significant role in the administration of justice. As such, it is imperative to sustain constant improvement of the Magistracy.

Your Worships entertain the majority of criminal and civil cases and to many, you are the face of justice. With the expandable access to the grass root, your courts are the entry points to the judiciary and therefore crucial to the justice system. Consequently, you are

expected to hear dispassionately, consider soberly and adjudicate appropriately.

Distinguished participants, let me remind you that with the rapid growth of our population and advancement in technologies, the challenges of dispute resolution in the 21st Century are enormous. We are therefore faced with an ever present clamour and demand for speedy, affordable and efficient administration of justice. Our ability to respond to the growing demands of judicial services goes a long way in determining our credibility and integrity. You will agree with me that we must continuously rise to the occasion in order to justify public confidence reposed in the Judiciary.

No doubt, technology has gradually transformed the manner in which activities in our courts are carried out, such as service of court processes, record keeping and retrieval of data and other operations. I therefore urge you to embrace technology in discharging your judicial responsibilities within the ambit of the law.

In response to the need for efficient justice delivery and case management, the Judiciary has adopted the use of new technology through the introduction of the Nigeria Case Management System (NCMS). This is an innovative case management system that is being piloted by the Supreme Court for subsequent roll out to the strata of courts in the earliest possible time.

Technology has further afforded us the opportunity to have virtual libraries and law reports at our finger tips. Case management tools can now be accessed 24 hours a day from the comfort of our homes and hearing notices will in the nearest future be e-mailed to lawyers once enrolment on the Judiciary's Nigerian Legal E-Mail System (NILES), is fully achieved in conjunction with the Nigerian Bar

Association. As we speak, the deadline for paper court processes in the Supreme Court has been fixed for July 2018.

Sequel to these and other strides to automate aspects of our Procedure and Rules, I urge you to ensure that you are proficient in the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Indeed, I must inform you that the e-proficiency will become a veritable pre-requisite for career advancement within our Judiciary in no distant future. Therefore, it will be in your own interest to key in these reforms, in order not to be left behind like a fossil, while the rest of the Judiciary make the evolutionary leap into an automated Judiciary.

My Lords, Distinguished participants, continuing judicial education is a mandatory requirement for every Judicial Officer who sits on the Bench for adjudication. Thus, regular research will further improve your competence, sharpen your skills and enhance your diligence in maintaining high standard of justice administration in our courts. It is therefore advisable for your worships to keep abreast with recent developments in law and judicial precedents of Superior Courts, so that you will not be found wanting in the performance of your duties.

It is pertinent to remind you as Magistrates, that you must be mindful of your professional duties as well as the ethical content of our Code of Conduct for Judicial Officers. It is an indispensable guide to the proper conduct and performance of your duties. The Code of Conduct for Judicial Officers embodies the best ethical practices that we must adopt if we are to uphold our independence and respect for the Rule of Law.

At this juncture, I urge you to always take charge of your courts in the discharge of your judicial functions. You must remain diligent,

conscientious and imbibe the fear of the Almighty God in the discharge of your duties.

My Lords, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen, permit me to express my gratitude to the Administrator of the National Judicial Institute, Hon. Mr. Justice R.P.I. Bozimo, OFR, under whose leadership the Institute has experienced tremendous growth.

My gratitude also goes to the Chairman and members of the Education Committee of the National Judicial Institute, the Management and staff of the Institute for their industry in putting this Course together.

My sincere gratitude also goes to our esteemed Chairman of Sessions and Resource Persons for graciously accepting to share their wealth of experience and knowledge with us.

It is now my singular honour and privilege to formally declare the 2018 Refresher Course for Magistrate, open.

I wish you all very fruitful and rewarding deliberations.

Thank you and God bless us all.

**Hon. Mr. Justice Walter Samuel Nkanu Onnoghen, GCON,
FNJI**

*Chief Justice of Nigeria and,
Chairman, Board of Governors, National Judicial Institute.*