

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE, THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF NIGERIA, HON. MR. JUSTICE WALTER SAMUEL NKANU ONNOGHEN, *GCON, FNJI*, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE WORKSHOP ON NIGERIAN LOCAL CONTENT DEVELOPMENT AND MONITORING (LAW & POLICY) FOR JUSTICES AND JUDGES ORGANISED BY THE JURIS LAW OFFICE, NIGERIAN CONTENT DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT BOARD IN COLLABORATION WITH THE NATIONAL JUDICIAL INSTITUTE HELD AT THE ANDREWS OTUTU OBASEKI AUDITORIUM, NATIONAL JUDICIAL INSTITUTE ON 6TH MARCH, 2018.

PROTOCOL

I am delighted to welcome you all to the Opening Ceremony of the National Workshop on Nigerian Local Content Development and Monitoring for Judicial Officers organised by the Nigerian Content Development and Management Board (NCDMB) in collaboration with the National Judicial Institute.

The Workshop is organised with the objective of keeping our Justices and Judges abreast with the role of the Judiciary in ensuring mastery of the dealings in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria. Indeed, the adjudicatory duty of a Judge can only be performed optimally when he remains up to date with the emerging developments and trends in jurisprudence pertaining to the oil and gas sector.

The theme of this Workshop is “***The Role of the Judiciary in the Effective Development of Nigerian Content in the Oil and Gas Industry***”. This Workshop seeks to highlight matters that are germane and critical to the ongoing reforms being experienced in Nigeria’s oil and gas sector. Indeed these reforms are epitomised by the willingness of the government to promote local content in the provision of technology and manpower to the downstream sector. In addition, the recent passage of the Petroleum Industry (Governance) Bill is an indication that the government is steering the oil and gas sector in the right direction.

The recent innovations in the oil and gas industry have inevitably introduced new legal regimes that will impact on the quality of justice delivery. I believe that this forum will be extremely beneficial to you in the performance of your duties and by extension the society at large.

It is our responsibility as Judicial Officers to sustain the public confidence reposed in the Judiciary. Hence, you must be seen to be knowledgeable in the law and be in charge of your courts to ensure speedy resolution of disputes which in turn serves to assure investors and other major players in the Oil and Gas industry that their investments are safe.

It is on record, My Lords, that the timely interventions of the court at critical points in this country have certainly contributed in no small measure to the peace and stability of the country today. I make bold to say, without any fear of contradiction, that the Nigerian Judiciary is a key partner in

ensuring stability in the oil and gas sector by interpretation of the relevant laws to the industry.

In this regard, I must not fail to emphasize that you must have recourse to the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry Content Development Act, 2010 when adjudicating over disputes related to Oil and Gas Servicing and Exploration Contracts as the clauses contained in such agreements must respect the stipulation of the Act with regard to deployment of local expertise and manpower in the downstream sector.

In addition, permit me to say that as Judicial Officers, you are expected to encourage the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution methods, such as Arbitration and Mediation, which will engender the expeditious resolution of cases in the industry. You must therefore adhere to my directive on invocation of arbitration clauses in commercial agreements prior to institution of actions allegedly arising from breach of such contracts.

My Lords, it is my expectation that participants will be enlightened on global best practices and measures adopted by regulators in resolving disputes arising in this sphere of the economy.

The Nigerian Content Development and Management Board (NCDMB) has been vested statutorily with special intervention powers and tools for the purpose of encouraging the utilisation of locally fabricated technology as well as human resources and manpower that are sourced locally in Nigeria. This in no small measure serves to encourage the improvement of home-

grown technology as well as preventing the dreaded menace of capital flight from Nigeria. The inevitable role played by the Board cannot be overemphasised as both direct and indirect employment is created locally for Nigerians. In addition, research and development in the oil and gas sector is encouraged.

On our own part, the Judiciary has been, and will continue to live up to its constitutional mandate by correctly applying the law and proactively supporting the regulators and stakeholders in the Oil and Gas industry such as the Nigerian Content Development and Management Board (NCDMB) in their bid to ensure growth and stability in the oil and gas sector in line with the Rule of Law.

Your Lordships, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, with the benefit of this discourse, it is my utmost belief that the synergy between the National Judicial Institute and the Nigerian Content Development and Management Board will record phenomenal achievements, most especially by expanding the knowledge base of our Judicial Officers in the areas of oil and gas law, as well as being part of an extensive effort to support growth in the sector.

Distinguished Participants, I urge you all to be active in the deliberations during this workshop as vital issues which are relevant and intuitive have been slated for discussion.

The Chairmen of Sessions and Resource Persons are versed and knowledgeable in this special area of the law and you can be rest assured that the pressing legal issues will be adequately

discussed. On this note, I implore participants to be vigorous in their contributions and incisive in their questions. I am confident that you will find the discussions stimulating and enlightening.

My Lords, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my singular honour and privilege to declare the National Workshop on Nigerian Local Content Development and Monitoring (Law & Policy) for Justices and Judges open.

I wish you all very fruitful and rewarding deliberations.

I thank you for your attention. May God bless us all. Amen.

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

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