

**FULL SPEECH OF PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI**

**AT THE  
OPENING CEREMONY OF  
THE 55<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL CONFERENCE  
OF THE NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION  
HOLDING AT THE  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE, ABUJA**

**ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 23, 2015**

## **Protocol**

1. It is a great pleasure to be among you today, as lawyers from all parts of Nigeria come together with some of their international colleagues for this year's Annual General Conference. I am informed that these Annual Conferences are the forum for periodic review of the state of the legal profession, our justice system and the general society. I therefore appreciate this opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you.

2. Since I got this invitation, I have been thinking a lot more about lawyers and their role in the great task of development which this administration, and I believe all Nigerians, have set for ourselves. This is more so as my colleague on this journey, the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osinbajo SAN, is a senior member of the Legal Profession. The more I consider it, the more I am convinced that law, law-makers, lawyers, law courts and the law enforcement agencies all have pivotal responsibilities to discharge, if the change we seek is ever to materialize.

3. As you all know by now, this administration has taken on the challenge of improving security, fighting corruption and revamping the economy, among many others. Security obviously depends on law and order. It also depends on the entire justice system working efficiently to ensure compliance with laws and appropriate safeguards for human rights.

4. In a functional justice system, violent dissent and stubborn insurgency would be countered effectively. When the law enforcement agencies and military personnel work with due regard for the rules and shun corruption; nepotism; and disrespect for human rights, we are also bound to get good results. Illegal groups can be promptly put down and we can have a quick restoration of peace.

5. Similarly, the fight against corruption is in reality a struggle for the restoration of law and order. Corruption and impunity become widespread when disrespect for law is allowed to thrive in society. Disrespect for law also thrives when people get away with all sorts of shady deals and the court system is somehow unable to check them. Ability to manipulate and frustrate the legal system is the crowning glory of the corrupt and, as may be expected, this has left many legal practitioners and law courts tainted in an ugly way.

6. In a gathering such as this, I do not need to elaborate on the way that corruption and impunity have damaged our economy. But I would like to say more on what, I believe, should be your role as legal practitioners, in helping us back to the path of rectitude. First, we need to make our courts functional and effective again. This means that we must have lawyers who take the ethics of the profession very seriously; lawyers who will not frustrate the course of justice, even though they defend their clients with all legitimate means and resources. Nigeria needs ethical lawyers who always keep the end of justice in mind and will never sacrifice the integrity of the legal system to cover the misdeeds of their clients, no matter how lucrative the brief may be.

7. I know that lawyers are always at the vanguard of human rights. What I urge now is that we all see corruption in its true colours; as a gross violation of human rights. For the masses of our people, the millions still wallowing in want and diseases, corruption is a major reason why they cannot go to school; why they cannot be gainfully employed; and why there are few doctors, nurses and drugs in their hospitals and health centers. It is the reason why pensioners are not paid and potable water is scarce.

8. In effect, corruption diverts public resources meant for millions of people into the private pockets of a greedy few, thereby causing a lot of suffering, deprivation and death. In my view, there can be no greater violation of human rights.

9. Viewed in this way, I think we can all fully appreciate the gravity of this oppressive and destructive evil. This should rouse us to fight it with the same zeal and doggedness as we deploy in the defense of fundamental rights.

10. When we subvert the system we join in the oppression of the masses and the destruction of systems which are meant to aid development and wellbeing of our society. Those who engage in such practices are, in effect, acting in a corrupt way.

11. If we turn directly to matters of economic advancement, it becomes even more important that our legal system is made to function smoothly speedily and effectively. Nigeria is now in a situation where it obviously has to diversify its economy, to step up its industrial production capacity and offer profitable services to the rest of the world. We also have a

huge infrastructure deficit for which we require foreign capital and expertise to supplement whatever resources we can marshal at home.

12. In essence, increased engagement with the outside world is called for as we seek public private partnerships in our quest for enhanced capital and expertise. This is the way of the new world for all countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

13. There is no doubt that all these depend on enforceable agreements and a reliable legal system. Contracts are only good to the extent that they are enforceable without undue delay. If by the default of lawyers or the law courts, it is found that cases take ages to conclude or that the judicial system is somehow corruptible, we obviously cannot attract the kind of partnerships which we need or which our large vibrant economy would ordinarily have attracted.

14. My Lords, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the world today has been correctly described as a global village. Capital and expertise are readily mobile. Comparisons will inevitably be drawn between our country and others when the choice of where to do business is being made. Our current position in this respect is not good enough. Our process for obtaining licenses and permits are too slow. It takes too long a time to enforce contracts in our law courts and our regulatory and administrative processes are not noticeably predictable or efficient.

15. In all these lawyers have a key role to play, whether in the reform of our laws and regulation or in the integrity of our judicial systems.

16. It is my fervent hope that this conference and other fora of lawyers and non-lawyers will closely and quickly work out ways of making our legal system much improved in terms of integrity, the human touch, efficiency and rigorous dedication to the cause of justice.

17. On our own part we shall not hesitate at all in giving effect to the required changes, whether on the statute books, in the judiciary or in legal education once we see the change well justified.

18. I have no doubt that when this is achieved, our society will be greatly improved, not just in terms of justice administration but also in the creation and advancement of economic opportunities which will pull many of our people out of poverty and guarantee us all the protection of our rights. So help us God.

19. Before I close, let me acknowledge with sincere gratitude the prominent role that this association played during the last general elections in the country. I am aware that the NBA organized a number of workshops and seminars and sponsored adverts and programs to enlighten the public about the electoral process, including the idea of a violence-free election. I am aware that there was even a Lawyers-For-Change Movement! It was due to your efforts and those of other patriotic Nigerians that Nigeria was able to give effect to their heartfelt desire. The nation is no doubt indebted to you.

20. I thank you very much for this opportunity and wish you fruitful deliberations in the course of the conference.