



ADDRESS BY AUGUSTINE ALEGHE SAN, FCIArb.[UK] PRESIDENT OF THE NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCHING OF THE LAWYERS' STAMP AND OTHER NBA AFFINITY PRODUCTS ON 15TH APRIL, 2015.

PROTOCOL

My Lord, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Hon. Justice Mahmud Mohammed GCON; Honourable Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Mohammed Bello Adoke SAN, CFR; Honourable Justices of the Supreme Court of Nigeria; the President of the Court of Appeal and other Justices of the Court of Appeal; Chief Judges of the Federal and various State High Courts, President of National Industrial Court, Grand Khadis and other Heads of Courts; Judges and Khadis of various Courts and other Judicial Officers here present; Past Presidents and General Secretaries of the NBA; National Officers of the NBA; Senior Advocates of Nigeria; Distinguished Benchers here present; Branch Chairmen and Secretaries; Learned Colleagues; Members of the Press; Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

PREFACE

I welcome you all to the official launching of the Nigerian Bar Association Stamp for lawyers and the unveiling of other NBA Affinity products today, Wednesday, 15th April, 2015.

The Nigerian Bar Association had in the past few months signed Partnership Agreements with several Service Providers for the provision of

welfare packages for its members. This initiative was in fulfillment of this present administration's promise to vigorously pursue and safeguard the interest of Nigerian lawyers. Today therefore marks the actualization of this promise and the beginning of a new dawn for the Nigerian legal profession.

NBA STAMP

The **Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners, 2007** makes it mandatory for every legal document signed and filed by a lawyer to bear a stamp and seal approved by the Nigerian Bar Association.

This requirement of law necessitated the recent decision of the NBA to engage the services of **Strataflex Nigeria Limited** for the provision of adhesive paper stamps for lawyers. These Stamps will only be issued to **verified lawyers** who have paid their Bar Practicing fees at the cost of **N4,000 (Four Thousand Naira only)** per pack of 120 (One Hundred and Twenty) stamps.

The stamps are valid for one year only [1st April- 31st March yearly and have distinctive high quality security features which make duplication and forgery close to impossible. The security features will continually be updated.

The stamps are specially designed to bear the name and enrolment number of each Lawyer. It is instructive to note that prior to this moment, there was no way of verifying the authenticity of legal documents said to have been prepared by lawyers. The introduction of the NBA Stamp will address and resolve this issue and all documents which bear this stamp

will prima facie be deemed to have emanated from the lawyer whose details are contained therein.

The NBA National Executive Committee approved the provision of two colours of the Stamps – Green and Red. The Green Stamps will be issued to Lawyers who are in Private legal practice while the Red stamps will be issued to lawyers in the Public Practice. The design and all the security feature of stamps are the same.

The provision of an NBA approved Stamp is further demonstration of the commitment of the NBA to promoting the Rule of Law in Nigeria. The situation where the authenticity of Legal documents has remained a mirage must come to an end immediately. Affidavits have become so abused that it is possible for a deponent to file an affidavit in Court declaring himself DEAD! The proliferation of quacks in the Legal Profession has reached an unbearable limit. We have left our doors so wide open that even foreign Lawyers are practicing Law in Nigeria in clear breach of the provisions of the Legal Practitioners Act, Cap L11 LFN, 2004. The introduction of the NBA approved seal would address this problem.

All NBA members must be united in addressing this scourge in the Legal Profession. We must all be watch dogs and enforcers if this policy is to succeed. Our collective welfare would remain threatened if we do not protect our business from legal and foreign quacks. The business we lose daily would come back to our members if we all cooperate to ensure the success of the Stamp policy.

We are not unaware of the initial doubts by Lawyers in Public practice that the colour coding of the stamps may adversely affect them. We met

with the leadership of the Law Officers Association of Nigeria [LOAN] and after exhaustive discussions resolved the issues and cleared their doubts. No system is perfect and the NBA being a dynamic body will continually review the implementation of the Stamp Policy to address any issues that may arise in the weeks, months and years ahead, as the welfare of NBA members is always of critical importance.

ANNUAL PRACTICE LICENSE

The NBA has also re-introduced the issuance of the **Annual Practice License** in line with the provisions of **Rule 12** of the **Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners 2007**. This has become an urgent need in the face of current improvements in the Banking sector which make tellers and receipts essentially obsolete. This initiative will also aid the NBA ineffectively dealing with local and foreign quacks in Nigerian.

The Annual Practice License will only be issued to lawyers duly verified by the NBA and certified to have paid their Bar Practicing fees. The Annual Practice License shall have a yearly lifespan and will be renewed upon the payment of the Bar Practicing Fees every year.

The Annual Practice License is expected to be displayed by every Lawyer in his Office and be made available as proof of payment of Annual Practicing Fees.

INSURANCE POLICY WITH LEADWAY ASSURANCE PLC

The NBA has partnered with **Leadway Assurance Company Limited** for the provision of a basic insurance cover for its members. This insurance cover comes at no extra cost to the Lawyer and is funded from the Annual Bar Practicing Fees paid to NBA. The scheme provides insurance cover of up

to **N1,000,000 (One Million Naira only)** for NBA member who qualify for the insurance.

We therefore call on every lawyer who has paid his/her Bar Practicing Fee to take advantage of this programme and ensure that the Insurance Forms are filled and submitted to the various NBA branches for onward transmission to Leadway Assurance Company Limited.

NBA will officially present the Insurance Policy Certificates to lawyers entitled to benefit under the Insurance programme.

NBA NATIONAL PRO BONO CENTRE

The Nigerian Bar Association has decided to setup a National Pro Bono Centre to address all issues relating to pro bono work/services rendered by Lawyers.

The NBA is pleased by the willingness of members to provide Pro bono services and continues to encourage more members to provide pro bono services. This is part of our contribution to the development of Our Country, Nigeria and a clear demonstration of providing access to justice for all aggrieved persons despite their financial challenges. Evidence of rendering Pro bono services has become a requirement for Lawyers seeking appointments and/or privileges in the Legal Profession.

However, there are several challenges involved in the structure and organisation of Pro Bono work. In certain instances, several Lawyers and NGOs are providing Pro Bono Service to the same person. In other instances, work for debtor clients is claimed as Pro bono work. This occurs as there is no coordination and/or certification of Pro bono work.

The NBA National Pro Bono Centre will serve as a clearing house and coordination point for all Pro bono Work. The Centre would develop an up to date database of all Pro bono work being done by various persons and bodies to eliminate duplication of efforts and streamline the work in a way that ensures efficiency and effectiveness. The most critical role of the NBA National Pro Bono Centre would be the certification of Pro Bono Work and issuance of Pro bono certificates.

This would ensure that persons actually engaged in the provision of provision of Pro Bono services would have NBA certification to confirm the Pro bono work. It would also help to eliminate cases where non Pro Bono work is wrongly classified as Pro bono work to take advantages available and/or meet qualification requirements of Pro Bono work.

The Pro Bono Certification would also address the issue of Lawyers engaged in Public Practice who carry out Pro Bono work as it will allow their seals to be used in respect of all such certified Pro bono work.

The NBA is working to ensure additional benefits for Pro Bono work and this would be made known to all members when finalized.

The NBA Pro Bono Centre would firm out Pro bono work in a manner that ensures quality representation for indigent Clients. The current system that matches indigent Clients with inexperienced Lawyers seeking to gain experience with Pro bono work needs to be addressed. In all such cases, more experienced Lawyers would be instructed by the Pro Bono Centre to lead the team handling the matter. We call for the cooperation of our senior Lawyers as we do not anticipate a situation where work firmed out by the National Pro Bono Centre would be rejected.

CONCLUSION

I want to seize this opportunity to specially thank the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Hon. Justice Mahmud Mohammed GCON for gracing this event with his presence despite his ever busy schedule. We most respectfully appeal to My Lord, the CJN to give the required Directions that would ensure the successful implementation of the NBA approved Stamp and Seal Policy and the Pro bono Declaration. Additionally, we respectfully request that all Heads of Courts in Nigeria and all other Bodies and Authorities be equally directed in that same regard.

On behalf of the NBA, I offer our profound thanks and appreciation to you all for making out time to attend this occasion.

We must not relent in our collective quest for a united and strengthened Nigerian Bar Association.

Long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria!

Long live the Nigerian Bar Association!

Thanks and welcome.

AUGUSTINE ALEGEH SAN, FCI Arb.[UK]

President, Nigerian Bar Association

15 April 2015.