

WELCOME ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE NATIONAL JUDICIAL INSTITUTE, HON. MR. JUSTICE R.P.I. BOZIMO, OFR, AT THE WORKSHOP ON ELECTION PETITIONS FOR JUSTICES AND JUDGES HELD AT THE ANDREWS OTUTU OBASEKI AUDITORIUM ON 28TH JANUARY 2019

PROTOCOL

I wish to extend my warm welcome to you all on this august occasion marking the opening ceremony of the workshop on Election Petitions for Justices and Judges. This programme is organized by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES) in collaboration with the National Judicial Institute (NJI).

I must congratulate your Lordships on this unique opportunity to serve in various capacities at the Election Petition Tribunals; and to participate in this workshop. The programme will no doubt present us with an opportunity to learn from, interact and exchange ideas with proficient resource persons and erudite Jurists.

My Lords, Distinguished Participants, this workshop is borne out of the desire of the Honourable, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Hon. Mr. Justice Walter Samuel Nkanu Onnoghen, GCON, FNJI, to ensure that all Judicial Officers apply the same reasoning in justice delivery at the Election Petition Tribunals.

This programme could not have come at a better time as we are in an election year; and the focus of the Judiciary is to re-instil public confidence, uphold the Rule of Law and dispense justice fairly to all persons. As we all know, the electioneering process is unique

and comes with diverse issues. To overcome these, there is the need to further build the capacity of Judicial Officers.

In addition to the foregoing, and as recently stated at the Annual Conference of the Court of Appeal, the Honourable, the Chief Justice of Nigeria emphasized the need to involve more Judges in both Election Petitions Tribunals and Election Appeals Tribunals as this will be an important boost towards broadening the institutional knowledge base, competence and capacity of our Judicial Officers to adjudicate on electoral matters.

My Lords, taking into consideration that Nigeria is still a developing nation with a relatively young democracy, there is bound to be some flaws and irregularities which will automatically translate into petitions. The Supreme Court in **Okechukwu V. INEC (2014) NWLR (Pt. 1436) 259 at 309** observed that:

“Elections are hardly ever conducted without some irregularities. No matter how well the regulatory authority conducts an election, there are complaints.”

This presupposes that these irregularities and complaints will more often than not lead to filing of petitions by aggrieved parties and the Judiciary is consequently tasked with the responsibility of hearing and determining same.

My Lords, Distinguished Participants, for Nigeria to have sustainable development, there must be a thriving democracy whose existence depends largely on a reliable, dependable and

impartial justice system as well as a workable and sustainable electoral mechanism.

With the 2019 General Elections in sight, adequate and swift fulfillment of the responsibility of the Judiciary therefore becomes important. This is premised on the fact that an effective Judiciary safeguards the democratic process and enforces the Rule of Law.

In the same vein, previous experience has shown that electoral matters are usually tasking, as it requires the Judge to be up and doing, leaving absolutely no room for external influence. I hereby enjoin our Justices and Judges to be responsive to their enormous responsibility of adjudication and dispensation of justice, in the discharge of their duties.

It goes without saying therefore that, a lucid understanding of the provisions of the law, with respect to electoral matters would aid in obviating inscrutability, opaqueness and technicalities which constitute the bane of justice.

On this note, I implore Your Lordships to give the interactive sessions your best attention, as it will further give you an insight into the skills and knowledge that will further help when sitting on Election Tribunal Cases.

At this juncture, permit me to thank My Lord, the Honourable, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, and Chairman, Board of Governors of the National Judicial Institute, Hon. Mr. Justice Walter Samuel Nkanu Onnoghen, GCON, FNJI, for his continuous support towards the

programmes of the Institute. My gratitude also goes to the President of the Court of Appeal, Hon. Mr. Justice Zainab Bulkachuwa, CFR, FNJI for her contribution in making this workshop a success.

I must not fail to thank the Chairman of INEC, Professor Mahmood Yakubu and the European Centre for Electoral Support, for their commitment towards organizing this significant event.

We are also grateful to the Chairmen of Sessions and Resource Persons for accepting our invitation to share their wealth of experience on the selected topics.

Finally, I must not fail to express gratitude to members of the Fourth Estate of the Realm for their reportage of the Institute's programmes and the Judiciary in general.

I wish you all fruitful and rewarding deliberations.

I also wish you all a prosperous New Year. Thank you and God bless us all.

Hon. Mr. Justice R.P.I Bozimo, OFR

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