**“PROTECTION OF COURT PREMISES AND COURT PERSONNEL” BEING A PAPER PRESENTED BY COL ABDULLAHI DUDU USMAN (RTD) ESQ ON THE OCCASION OF THE INDUCTION COURSE FOR NEWLY APPOINTED MAGISTRATES, ORGANIZED BY THE NATIONAL JUDICIAL INSTITUTE ABUJA, 14TH TO 18TH AUGUST, 2023**

**Introduction**

It is an honour to have been asked to take part in the Seminar that strive to promote judicial excellence and enhancing the security of Nigerian judicial officers in the aftermath. The opportunity to exchange ideas and best practice between judicial colleagues and drawing from my meritorious military service would no doubt go a long way to boost or achieve the aim of this Seminar.

**Salutation**

Before proceeding further, I want to use this medium to appreciate and thank the organizers of this august seminar in August and urge that they must not relent as they strive to ensure a secured judicial system and protected judicial personnel across the board and at all levels.

**The Essence of the Seminar**

The essence of this seminar is to enhance the knowledge of the judicial officers on how to be conscious and aware to the level of security threats generally and to create a robust culture of security awareness at home, at the work place, in all places. It is also to collectively work together to further promote and enhance the security and the stability of the judiciary within the context of national aspiration and security and I have no doubt in my mind that this will be attainable for the betterment of our nation. I am not here to make you paranoid, (afraid of other people and believing that they are trying to harm you), but to add valued knowledge that will show you how to improve your personal security in particular.

**The Scope of the Seminar**

If we are to delve deeply on all security issues as related to the Judiciary, we may spend the whole day doing so, without getting close to the introductory aspect of the theme. Consequently, I shall limit my considerations to the aspect of security awareness of the newly appointed Judges with respect to their personal security on one hand and the issues of cybersecurity with respect to document security on the other hand.

**Security awareness/Consciousness.**

Security consciousness or awareness is defined *as a state of mind and attitude of being aware and conscious about the safety and survival of lives and property, which leads to taking necessary, proactive, preventive steps to ensure that all goes well.*

[Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Security_awareness) defines security awareness as the *“knowledge and attitude members of an organization possess regarding the protection of the physical and especially, information assets of that organization.* Presently, there is an increased potential for people to deliberately or accidentally pose a potent threat to the judicial worker and systems. For this reason, it becomes mandatory to organize security awareness training for all newly appointed Judges as well as existing ones.

**The Judiciary in Nigeria**

The judicial branch of government refers to a country’s court system and are responsible for interpreting and applying a country’s laws in particular cases, and can also be invested with the power to strike down laws that it deems unconstitutional. The judiciary also has the power to make court decisions that interpret and apply the constitution in cases they hear and act upon that can help entrench true democracy in Nigeria. I have no doubt in my mind that you will leave up to these tasking responsibilities.

The journey from the beginning, evolution, growth and development of the Nigerian judiciary had been long, winding, tortuous and daunting to the extent of being insecure and ever vulnerable, yet, credible efforts had been made to address it.

The essence of justice is to achieve it swiftly and surely. The duration of litigation must thus be delicately balanced with the outcome in a way and manner that delay is not occasioned and the integrity of the outcome is not compromised, because, this directly or indirectly had impact on the security of the court and its personnel. Empirical survey reveals that most countries of the world have achieved relative success in their efforts to enhance effective justice delivery and hence, contributed to their security and stability, we can therefore not be an exception in this quest.

Today, much as the judiciary strive to discharge its statutory mandates, there are impediments to effective justice delivery in Nigeria. Today, the Nigeria’s judiciary is been challenged on all fronts by all manner of impediments. These include but not limited to, absence of case management strategy, general insecurity, attacks of judicial staff, overloaded filling of actions in our courts, congested prisons, delays in litigation, fewer courts and judicial officers, deplorable courtrooms, un- automated court system, lawyers and judges inventing and deploying subterfuges and dilatory tactics in the conduct of cases all geared towards occasioning delays etc.

However, a host of legislative interventions geared towards fast-tracking judicial activities and reducing delays of pendency of cases as well as Alternative Dispute Resolutions, introduction of specialized courts, robust welfare of judges and judicial officers and technology, have been introduced to address some of these impediments.

The more the determination to address these challenges, the more secure our nation will be and the better for the judiciary. The security challenges facing the nation’s judiciary is unconnected to the external challenges facing the country as a whole. Today, there is an unprecedented level of poverty, growing social inequality, youth unemployment and corruption in the land.

The major factor behind Nigeria’s poverty and inequality is unemployment and under-employment. From data available from the National Bureau of Statistics, the unemployment rate for both sexes are 29.3%. Other estimates suggest that at least 20 million (or 42%) of Nigerian youths between the ages of 18 and 35 are unemployed. Some estimate that only about 20 million Nigerians have jobs of any kind, out of a population of nearly 170 million. Many young people do not have jobs and have little hope of finding one.

**Security**

Security according to Wikipedia, *is protection from, or resilience against,*[*potential*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potential)*harm (or other unwanted*[*coercion*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coercion)*) caused by others, by restraining the freedom of others to act.* It is also *a* state of being protected or safe from harm. Security encompasses much more than the effective and efficient deployment of armed forces. But to ensure that Justice—in terms of both substance and procedure—is essential for security and stability, is well served.

The fact is that Security as a system encompasses much more than the deployment of armed forces/security. In addition, it is equally in having an effective judicial system, which works to defusing societal conflicts and provide a check on a state's use of coercive force and also play a critical role in ensuring the oversight and accountability of the security sector. When security forces are not held accountable under such circumstances, civilian-security sector relations suffer.

Personal security refers to the safety of human beings and the ways in which they are enabled to live a full and productive life with dignity, without feeling afraid or at risk.

**Manifestation of security challenges in the judiciary**

The security of judicial officer is a crucial aspect of maintaining the independence and integrity of the judiciary. Judicial officers, such as judges, magistrates, and other court personnel, often deal with sensitive and contentious issues that can put them at risk. Ensuring their security is essential for them to perform their duties without fear or favour.

Today, the Nigerian judiciary is facing a lot of security challenges; the number of reported incidents of courthouse violence has increased, yet, awareness of the need to improve security in the judiciary and its personnel has not been given due attention, particularly, the personal safety of judges and court staff outside those facilities. Recent tragic events across the country, have highlighted the vulnerability of judges and judicial workers, not only at work but also at home.

Today, the widespread use of social media and online privacy issues continues to pose significant new potential threats to the judiciary. For example, the presence (or absence) of safeguards and protections of sensitive personal information, such as judges’ home addresses, have continue to have a significant safety impact.

Recently, the judicial community in Nigeria had had experiences of the attacks on Court settlements which have made many to be concerned about the security of the court premises and the lives of judges in the administration of justice in Nigeria. On or around May, 2016, Hoodlums were reported to have invaded Rivers judiciary Complex, killing two persons in the attack. Many were reported to have escaped for fear of death in the process. In November, 2016, an attack of the courts in Benue was reported where many case files were taken away. *Leadership Today* on February, 2016 also reported a case where hoodlums invaded the Imo State Magistrates’ Court III for refusing to grant bail to one David Ndulo. Most recently, a case of one notorious criminal by named *Vampire* was reported. According to reports by Daily Trust, and other newspapers, on the 27th of January, 2017 some hoodlums suspected to be loyalist to one Vampire also described as King of the underworld, attacked the Owerri High court in Imo state, leading to the killing of some persons while others sustained injury.

These and many more are examples of various attacks on the courts in Nigeria which poses a threat to the life and existence of the Judiciary (Court premises) in Nigeria. In most cases these attacks are done by loyalist of suspected criminals with serious criminal records. These criminals range from rapists, killers, to kidnappers, etc whose presence in court should not be taken for granted by any responsible government, because they are criminally minded and as such, made up their mind for the worse if necessary.

At this stage, it is imperative to ask or observe that we don’t really have standard records of offenders/Convicts/Criminals confidentially kept in the event of criminal/intruders to courts (Court premises).

**Security challenges facing the judiciary**

Incidents of invasion on various courts in Nigeria are rising daily. First of its kind was the destruction of courts and stealing of courts’ facilities perpetrated by some miscreants who lodged their criminal goals under the pretense of #endsars protest on October 2021, where several lives and properties were lost and many citizens and the country are still in excruciating pains. Thereafter, just weeks or days ago, some courts in the South-East of Nigeria were invaded and some burnt down rending those courts not fit for hearing of cases.

Security is very important in the fulfillment of the roles of the courts of law. Sad to observe that many of our Nigerian courts do not also have at least police officer or armed security personnel guarding the premises, making it more vulnerable in the process.

Today, many of the judicial or sitting judges (especially those of the lower courts such as Area Courts’ Judges (Kadis); Customary Courts’ Judges, etc.,) have no police officer/orderly guarding them; this deficiency in the administration of justice has continued till date. The judicial staff are being trailed, threatened, raped, injured, harassed or assassinated, due to low level of security protection or awareness available to or around them. No doubt, Judicial independence is greatly undermined when judges are no longer able to exercise their functions without fear of reprisals, kidnapping, reprimand or attack on their persons, immediate family and property. Hence, the need for security awareness and preparedness.

The implication of insecurity on the Nigerian judiciary is dire; for instance, The Abia state Judiciary had to relocate its magistrate court in Umuchieze, Umunneochi local government area of the state, due to insecurity. The Registrar of Abia Judiciary as at then, Mr. Benson Anya, regretted that the decision was taken after persistent attacks on the court facilities by herdsmen and other hoodlums, who were alleged to have raped and harassed court officials without provocation.

***Here are some key consideration regarding the security of judicial officers.***

1. Physical Security: Judicial officers should have adequate physical security measures in place to protect them from potential threats. This may include surveillance systems, secure entrances, and trained security personnel at courthouses and residences. The level of security may vary depending on the nature of the cases they handle and the prevailing local conditions.
2. Threat Assessment Regular threat assessments should be conducted to identify potential risks to judicial officers. These assessments may involve analyzing factors such as the nature of cases, public perceptions, and any previous threats or attacks. Based on the assessment, appropriate security measures can be implemented.
3. Confidentiality: Maintaining the confidentiality of judicial officers personal information, such as home addresses and contact details, is crucial for their security. This information should be securely handled and shared on a need-to-know basis.
4. Training and Awareness: Judicial officers should receive training on personal security awareness, including how to recognize and respond to potential threats. This training may cover topics such as situational awareness, personal safety measures, and emergency protocols.
5. Collaboration with Law Enforcement: Close collaboration between judicial authorities and law enforcement agencies is essential for the security of judicial officers. This collaboration can involve sharing information about potential threats, conducting joint security operations, and providing a swift response in case of emergencies.
6. Cyber Security: In the digital age, cyber security is an important aspect of overall security. Judicial officers and court personnel should be educated about best practices for securing their online presence, including protecting their digital devices, using strong passwords, and being vigilant against publishing attempts or online harassment.
7. International Standards and Guidelines: Many countries have international obligational obligations to protect the security of judicial officers. These obligations may be derived from international human rights instruments or regional agreements. Governments should ensure compliance with these standards and guidelines to safeguard the security and independence of judicial officers.

Overall, the security of judicial officers is crucial for maintaining the rule of law and protecting the independence of the judiciary. Governments, judicial authorities, and relevant stakeholders should work together to implement appropriate security measures and ensure the well-being of judicial officers.

**The Cybersecurity and Data Security**

Cyber security is the practice of defending computers, servers, mobile devices, electronic systems, networks, and data from malicious attacks. It remains relevant in today’s world that is knowledge-driven and ICT culture, where all judges do most of their works on computers and other smart electronic devices that are interlinked and consequently vulnerable.

Data security on the other hand is the practice of protecting digital information from unauthorized access, corruption, or theft throughout its entire lifecycle. It is a fact that many Judges write their judgement in digital format; this can easily be compromised, unless and until specific security strategies is put in place to do so.

No doubt, efforts have been put in place to address these challenges, the fact that it remains upscales shows that more awareness and efforts is still needed so as to make the desired difference.

**Ways forward**

The newly appointed Judges must abide by the revised code of conduct for judicial officers of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. They must exhibit caution in relating with the larger society, in attending social functions or in belonging to social union or groups. They may participate in community, non-profit making organizations of various types by becoming a member of an organization and its governing body such as charitable but they must be wary and prohibited from accepting gift no matter how good intentioned etc. They must endeavor for the utmost standards of integrity in both their professional and personal lives.

Judicial independence is important for maintaining judges' impartiality and the rule of law as well as mitigating security threats to judicial workers. By convention and constitutionally, the Judiciary is supposed to be independent entity. The protection of judicial independence is usually considered as including various aspects that operate on different levels: external and internal independence, and institutional and individual independence. Hence the need to enhance factors that promote and uphold the independence of the judiciary.

**Protection and promotion of judicial independence**

Such factors include but not limited to the following; enhancement of the procedures of appointment and promotion of judges; constitution of judicial councils, enhancing the terms and conditions of judicial tenure, boosting the financial autonomy of the judiciary and ensuring effective court administration, as well as proper judicial conduct and discipline.

The security of the nation is directly dependent on the security of the judiciary and its staff, hence, the need for greater collective efforts, at all level towards addressing it. Much as we provide suggestions, to which the government can use to address these challenges, we must equally and constantly provide some security awareness tips to help enhance the security of the personnel of the judiciary.

It is the considered opinion of this paper that personal security awareness is the most significant of all security awareness tips/challenges, hence the following;

1. Government needs to put in place laws to prohibit posting personal information about a judicial officer for public eye, particularly, their valuable data and home address.
2. Government must put in place policies and law that prohibit or limit releasing of addresses or other contact information of judicial officers, court employees, and/or their families.

3.0 Government needs to among other responses, set up a Joint Court Security and Emergency Preparedness Committee that will conduct a survey of the members to help develop a source for comprehensive data regarding laws, policies, procedures, and resources relating to judicial security across the states and to try to create a broader understanding of the state of security in the courts.

4.0 Government needs to establish The National Center for Judicial Security (NCJS) to provide subject matter expertise, training, and development for worldwide endeavors related to court security, the protection of the judicial family, and securing the rule of law.

5.0 Government must put in place policies and law that provide for enhanced penalties for crimes against judges or court employees.

6.0 Government must put in place policies and statutes that provide for enhanced penalties for crimes at, in, or near a courthouse and regarding reporting of threats and incidents.

7.0 It must put in place policies and procedures regarding the use of social media and the internet by judges and/or staff related to personal safety and security

8.0 It need to provide personal safety resources or measures for judges and/or court staff. these resources include (e.g., personal security, home security audits and enhancements, training, online personal information security, and/or information removal services).

9.0 Government must partner with stakeholders, especially, security experts, to engage in continuousonline security awareness training, (as the mirror image of its classroom-based equivalent) for all judicial officers to further deepen the security level and personal responses. This will also help to prevent or mitigate harm—to both the judiciary and its stakeholders—and reduce human security risk and threats.

10.0 Efforts must be made to ensure that courts are not established in isolated environments in some parts of Nigeria, (especially those lower courts such as Magistrates, Area Courts and Customary Courts, but be relocated to an environment where armed security personnel can then be provided to secure the court and its staff. This stationing of armed security personnel would also boost the morale of those courts to carry out their official duties. Litigants, witnesses, courts’ officials and lawyers too would be encouraged to approach the court of law.

11.0 Government needs to set up special Marshal that will be responsible for judicial security. Since 1789, the U.S. Marshals Service has been responsible for judicial security in Federal courts and protects about 2,700 judges.

12.0 Government needs to put in place laws to address insecurity in Nigeria. New Zealand also has Law that provides for security of courts and the safety of the public and others who access and use the courts. Judges, jurists and umpire alike, may be seen as some demi-gods, but it must be noted that they are also humans with flesh and blood and citizens as well that are entitled to the protection of their lives.

**The security tips for personal security Nigerian judiciary Judges**

As a newly appointed Judges of the Nigerian judiciary, the following security tips will no doubt help you to stay safe and upbeat.

**Don’t give personal information readily to any one**

Always ask questions before disclosing private information about yourself or your employer – especially when you think the requested details are not necessary for the objective.

Never leave a valuable document inside the car or open in your computer of phones.

**Use social media with caution**

Your information is never safe on sites like Facebook as hackers easily find their way through people’s accounts. So, always think twice before posting any sensitive or private information on these sites that may help hackers steal your private information.

**Protect your computers while on wireless networks**

Because wireless networks are shared, they are a huge risk and your password can be stolen by hackers. So, always keep your computer protected by turning on your firewall and avoid sending your passwords through the air.

**Never disclose passwords and PINs**

Don’t ever be too trusting of your friends, relatives, or your colleagues at work. Always keep your passwords and PINs to yourself. The more you disclose your private information to others, the higher your risks of being harmed.

**Mind your clicks**

Before you go ahead to browse through a website’s pages, read the privacy policy to know if some of your entered information would be shared.

Install pep/spy holes in all exterior doors so you can identify whoever is outside

When servicing your car, always remove your house and office keys from your key ring

Give a code of identifications to your children if you have to send your assistant to collect them from school.

Avoid routinely lifestyle that can easily be monitored and predictable

Ensure you do not live in isolation but also be in touch with and communicate with your neighbors, who may come to your rescue in times of emergency.

Always close and lock garage doors and windows.

Be alert for unusual activities. If you see unfamiliar persons loitering around a neighbour’s yard, check their identity with your neighbour by phone; or call the Police.

Be careful about admitting strangers. Identification of a salesperson, public utilities and repair personnel must be checked before opening the door.

Do not keep valuable items near windows with open drapes.

Get to know your neighbours in order to watch each other’s homes.

Install new locks when moving into an apartment or previously owned home.

Keep extra keys in a safe place; never hide a key outside.

Leave a radio on low when leaving home, even for short time.

Lock up all ladders and tools a burglar could use to gain entry.

Never leave a note on the door saying why you are not at home.

Never leave doors or windows unlocked when leaving home.

Only put your last name on your nameplate or mailbox.

Use a timer that turns a living room light on at dusk - especially if you are going to be away.

When returning home, be mindful of anything unusual with your residence. If you suspect a break-in, do not enter - call Police.

Try not to travel at night and keep your travel plans, including accommodation details, to yourself.

Ask your hotel manager for advice on 'safe' versus 'unsafe' local areas.

**Do Not Accept Rides Offered by Strangers**

Put surveillance camera in your office and homes

Avoid being alone with stranger in a lift in public building

Try as much as possible to discourage room service while you lodge in a hotel and also know the number and location of the hotel security.

Always check your vehicle (for bombs or IED), if you ever park in a popular car parking lot

Try never to use ATM machine at night, especially in an area you are not familiar with

At the Airport, remain alert at all times and never agree to carry a package for a stranger or friend, for any reasons

Report suspicious actions in your neighborhood to the law enforcement agents in your area

Ensures a “layered protections” on your vehicles by installing either a warning device, immobilizing device or tracking device, while you keep a photocopy of your vehicle registration and insurance card in your wallet at home.

Protect yourself from crime involves minimizing the risks of becoming the victims of street crime, and that involves taking sensible precautions. It’s about having an awareness, as best as you can, of where you are, and the people that are in your surroundings.

Security awareness is marked by realization, perception or knowledge of risk or threats that are not generally known, security consciousness is therefore the direct result of security awareness.

**Conclusion**

Although much has been done in the courts in Nigeria to improve the security and safety of Judges and of those working in and visiting courthouses, much work remains to be done. We must continue to assess the national landscape and identify possible strategies to enhance the security of our court and in the process, better address personal security and safety challenges facing its staff. This will no doubt entail developing a comprehensive resource that can assist courts across the nation in developing strategies and identifying opportunities to better protect their judges and staff and the newly appointed Judges

It is cheaper to prevent crime, than to detect it. Be proactive, be aware and be sensitive. Let security consciousness be your way of life, protect your family, and protect yourself. Trust your instinct and use your best judgement.

Finally, an addendum to this paper in the form of personal security precautions which further emphasized my focus – Personal security, awareness and consciousness is provided to enrich and enhance the perception of personal security awareness.

Thank you for listening