



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

**HON. JUSTICE KUDIRAT M. O. KEKERE-EKUN, GCON
CHIEF JUSTICE OF NIGERIA**

AT

**AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
WOMEN JUDGES AFRICAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE**

ORGANISED BY

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN JUDGES NIGERIA (NAWJN)

THEME: "PROMOTING EXCELLENCE IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE"

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PROTOCOL

It is a distinct privilege and profound honour to address this distinguished gathering at the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) African Regional Conference. This Conference comes at a particularly significant moment in the evolution of our justice systems across Africa. At a time when societies are confronted by complex social, economic, technological, and governance challenges, the role of the Judiciary has never been more consequential. The administration of justice remains the bedrock upon which peaceful societies, democratic institutions, and sustainable development are built. Whenever justice is impartial, accessible and effective, citizens develop confidence in the rule of law; where it is absent, uncertainty and instability inevitably follow.

This engagement therefore represents far more than a professional gathering. It serves as an important platform for reflection, collaboration, and renewed commitment to the ideals that define judicial service. It is also a powerful catalyst for advancing judicial excellence, promoting gender equality, strengthening institutional integrity, and enhancing the protection of fundamental rights across our Continent.

In particular, this year's theme, *"Promoting Excellence in the Administration of Justice,"* is both timely and profound. It invites us to examine the very values that sustain public confidence in the Judiciary.

Excellence in the administration of justice is not measured solely by the number of cases disposed of or the speed with which judgments are delivered. It is measured by the quality of judicial reasoning, the integrity of judicial officers, the fairness of judicial processes, and the confidence that citizens repose in the courts as impartial arbiters of disputes. Excellence is ultimately reflected in the ability of the Judiciary to uphold the Constitution, protect the vulnerable, preserve the rule of law, and dispense justice without fear, favour, affection or ill will.

The administration of justice is not an abstract ideal existing in isolation. Rather, it serves as a foundational cornerstone of societal and institutional stability, transcending the mere operational functions of courts and their procedural workflows. It not only guarantees good governance but also shapes the equity and equality of existing systems, while underpinning the distribution of fundamental rights and civic duties in every State.

The Judiciary occupies a unique position within democratic governance. Unlike the Executive, it commands no army. Unlike the Legislature, it controls no public purse. Yet its authority derives from something far more enduring and that is the confidence of the people in its impartiality, integrity and fidelity to the law. It is therefore incumbent upon all Judicial officers to ensure that every action, every decision, and every interaction strengthens rather than diminishes that confidence. Consequently, fostering excellence within the judicial framework demands efficiency, transparency, accountability, accessibility, and unwavering commitment to ethical standards.

Judicial efficiency is undoubtedly a primary benchmark for measuring the quality of adjudication, particularly in light of the legitimate expectation of court users that disputes should be resolved fairly and within a reasonable time. In considering the pursuit of greater efficiency within the Judiciary, two critical elements warrant close attention: technology and judicial education.

It is impressive to note that Judiciaries worldwide are increasingly leveraging technology to modernize and streamline the administration of justice. This digital transformation has significantly enhanced justice delivery across jurisdictions by optimizing processes, reducing administrative burdens, and

expanding access to courts. However, as the Judiciary advances further into the digital age, it is imperative that technological innovation remains firmly anchored to the foundational principles of justice. Technology must remain an instrument for advancing fairness rather than creating new barriers to access.

While digital transformation offers unprecedented opportunities for efficiency, it must never eclipse the human dimension of justice. Behind every case file is a human story; behind every legal dispute are individuals, families, communities, and institutions whose lives may be profoundly affected by judicial decisions. Technology may assist judicial processes, but it can never replace the wisdom, empathy, discernment, and moral judgment that lie at the heart of judicial decision-making.

Judicial education stands as another pivotal component in promoting excellence in the administration of justice. Beyond enhancing professional competence, judicial education reinforces the rule of law, preserves the integrity of legal institutions, and equips judicial officers with the knowledge and skills necessary to address emerging legal challenges. Ultimately, continuous judicial training fosters a more responsive, efficient, and impartial justice system capable of sustaining public confidence in democratic

governance. Professional development is therefore not a luxury but a necessity. It is an indispensable requirement for any Judiciary committed to excellence.

Indeed, learning must remain a lifelong obligation for every judge. The law evolves. Society evolves. Technology evolves. Consequently, judicial officers must continuously equip themselves to respond effectively to new legal realities while remaining firmly rooted in enduring legal principles.

Excellence in the administration of justice also requires a thoughtful examination of the relationship between gender equality and the legal system. The full and effective participation of women within the Judiciary has far-reaching implications for justice delivery. From broadening jurisprudential perspectives to reducing unconscious biases and strengthening public confidence in legal institutions, the presence of women on the Bench enriches the administration of justice in meaningful ways.

Over the years, we have witnessed encouraging progress in the representation of women within Judiciaries across the world. Nevertheless, while notable gains have been made, particularly at entry and intermediate levels, significant work remains to be done in ensuring equal representation

within leadership positions and at the highest levels of judicial decision-making. The pursuit of gender equality within the Judiciary is not merely a matter of representation; it is fundamentally a matter of institutional legitimacy. A Judiciary that reflects the diversity of the society it serves is better positioned to command public confidence and to appreciate the varied experiences that come before it. Diversity strengthens judicial deliberation, enriches legal reasoning, and ultimately enhances the quality of justice delivered.

The Judiciary, like many institutions, emerged from historical structures with often limited opportunities for women. While considerable progress has been achieved, we must remain vigilant to ensure that our institutions are not constrained by the very inequalities they are called upon to remedy. Ultimately, gender inclusion must be viewed as an indispensable component of the Judiciary's commitment to fairness, equality, and the rule of law.

In the same vein, we must encourage strategic and enduring mentorship initiatives that create pathways for continuity, sustainability, and intergenerational impact. Those who have attained positions of leadership bear a responsibility to inspire, support and guide those who follow. The success of any institution is not measured solely by the achievements of its

present leaders but also by its capacity to prepare the next generation to surpass them.

We must therefore embrace a culture of collaboration and mutual support, recognising that the strength of the Judiciary is built collectively rather than individually. The foregoing underscores the immense value of the cross-jurisdictional exchanges that will take place during this Conference. Through the sharing of experiences, challenges, innovations, and best practices, we strengthen not only our individual Judiciaries but also the broader administration of justice across Africa.

The challenges confronting African Judiciaries may differ in form, but they are often united by common aspirations: the aspiration for independent courts, accessible justice, efficient case management, ethical leadership, and enduring public trust. Conferences such as this provide an invaluable opportunity to learn from one another and collectively advance those aspirations.

At this juncture, I must specially acknowledge and appreciate the esteemed presence of the First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Her Excellency, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, CON, for honouring this Conference with her

presence and for her unwavering commitment to the advancement of women, the promotion of social justice, and the empowerment of vulnerable groups across our nation. Her participation in this important gathering is a powerful affirmation of the vital role of women in leadership and of the collective responsibility to build institutions that are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all members of society.

I further acknowledge the presence of the Chief Justice and President of the Supreme Court of Kenya, Hon. Justice Martha Karambu Koome, EGH, who is ably represented at this Conference by Hon. Justice Njoki Ndungu, CBS, Judge of the Supreme Court of Kenya.

I also commend the Honourable President of the Court of Appeal and President of the National Association of Women Judges Nigeria (NAWJN), Hon. Justice M.B. Dongban-Mensem, CFR, together with the Executive Members and Organising Committee, for their dedication and tireless efforts in ensuring the success of this Conference.

I equally appreciate all Speakers, Session Chairpersons, Discussants and Participants for their willingness to contribute their knowledge, experience and expertise to these deliberations.

As we commence this Conference, let us remember that the administration of justice is ultimately a sacred public trust. The judgments we deliver today will shape lives, influence institutions, and contribute to the legal legacy we leave for future generations. We must therefore strive not merely to administer justice, but to administer it with wisdom, courage, integrity and compassion.

May this Conference inspire renewed commitment to excellence, strengthen bonds of professional solidarity across our Continent, and generate practical solutions that will further enhance the administration of justice in Africa.

On this note, it is now my singular honour and privilege to formally declare open this International Association of Women Judges African Regional Conference.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you fruitful, productive, and rewarding deliberations.

God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Hon. Justice Kudirat Motonmori Olatokunbo Kekere-Ekun, GCON
Chief Justice of Nigeria and Chairman, Board of Governors, National Judicial
Institute