

DRAFT COMMUNIQUÉ

**INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN
JUDGES (IAWJ) AFRICAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE,
ABUJA, NIGERIA 2026
8TH – 12TH OF JUNE 2026**

PREAMBLE

- The International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) African Regional Conference 2026 was held in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria and hosted by the National Association of Women Judges of Nigeria (NAWJN). The theme was “**PROMOTING EXCELLENCE IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE.**”
- The conference brought together women judges and legal luminaries from across the African continent and beyond.

RESOLUTIONS

Recalling the core mandate of the judiciary to uphold the rule of law, protect the vulnerable, and dispense justice without fear, favour, affection or ill will; acknowledging the strides made by women in African judiciaries while noting persistent gender representation gaps at senior leadership levels; recognizing the transformative role of technology and the need to balance innovation with the human dimension in adjudication; and affirming the strategic role of IAWJ in advancing judicial diplomacy, mentorship, and cross-jurisdictional collaboration, the delegates do hereby resolve and issue the following communiqué:

1. JUDICIAL EXCELLENCE & PUBLIC TRUST

Excellence in justice administration must be measured by quality of reasoning, integrity, fairness, and protection of the vulnerable, not just case volume or speed of disposal of cases.

- Judicial officers must uphold the highest standards of competence, accountability, and ethical conduct to maintain public trust, in the realization that the judiciary’s authority and relevance rest on moral and public confidence, not force or purse.

- Judicial Officers must ensure qualitative benchmarks for excellence, integrity, quality of reasoning, fairness, and protection of the vulnerable as the primary measures of judicial performance.

2. GENDER EQUALITY & INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

The IAWJ African Region noted that:

- gender diversity on the bench is essential for institutional legitimacy, broader jurisprudential perspectives, and zero tolerance for unconscious bias;
- deliberate structural reforms are required to close persistent representation gaps for women, especially at senior/leadership levels of African judiciaries;
- IAWJ reaffirms a commitment to advancing gender equality, judicial capacity building, and expanding opportunities for women in the justice sector;
- IAWJ commits to deliberate structural reforms, policies, and succession plans that close gender leadership gaps and ensure equal representation of women at all tiers of judicial decision-making; and
- resolves to mandate all IAWJ national associations across Africa to develop mentorship pipelines for young women lawyers, aspiring and serving judges.

3. TECHNOLOGY & ACCESS TO JUSTICE

- Technology must be leveraged to modernize courts and reduce administrative burdens, and remain an instrument to expand access, not create new digital barriers;
- Judges should utilise Artificial Intelligence but uphold the irreplaceable role of human intelligence and judgment, empathy and moral discernment in adjudication, and resist over-reliance on digital tools at the expense of justice;
- effective case management, proper scheduling, strategic planning, an efficient case allocation system to improve productivity, reduce court congestion, will ensure the timely delivery of justice; and
- judges must verify AI-generated outputs, avoid overreliance on emerging technologies.

4. CONTINUOUS CAPACITY BUILDING

The Conference affirmed that:

- continuous professional development is a mandatory obligation, not a luxury, for all judicial officers due to evolving law, society and technology; and
- Senior Judges and judicial leaders are encouraged to actively mentor, sponsor and guide the next generation of women jurists across Africa through conferences like IAWJ African Regional Conference.

5. JUDICIAL DIPLOMACY & COLLABORATION

Recognizing the IAWJ as a vital instrument of judicial diplomacy for cross-border peer exchange, sharing best practices, and strengthening judicial institutions across Africa and globally, the conference resolved to:

- strengthen IAWJ as a platform for peer exchange, sharing of best practices, and collective strengthening of judicial institutions across African jurisdictions;
- promote cross-border dialogue on common challenges such as case management, ethics, and protection of human rights; and
- institutionalize reforms to make African justice systems responsive to unique socio-economic realities, broaden access to justice, and advance nation-building.

6. INSTITUTIONAL REFORM & COMPLIANCE

- To uphold strict compliance with regulatory and statutory frameworks governing judicial administration and pension benefits to safeguard the rule of law and institutional integrity.

7. WORK AND LIFE BALANCE

- Judicial officers should strive to maintain a healthy balance between professional responsibilities and personal life as a prerequisite for effective judicial service;
- Judges should prioritize their physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing through regular self-care, periodic medical check-ups, and adherence to appropriate medical advice;

- Judicial officers should intentionally create time for themselves, establish healthy boundaries, avoid unnecessary emotional burdens, and cultivate strong support systems, including faith, family, colleagues, friends, and professional networks, to sustain personal wellbeing and professional effectiveness; and
- wellness is positive, affirming, and contributes to living a long and healthy life, while optimal wellbeing is achievable through a conscious, self-directed effort.

8. MENTORING AND NURTURING

Recognizing that judges are natural mentors, the Conference emphasized:

- the need for sustained mentorship to uphold professional standards, preserve the integrity of the Bench, and safeguard the reputation of the Association;
- that the future African judge must be a person of uncommon character, unshakeable integrity, and unwavering commitment to justice;
- the importance of solidarity among women judges, because when one woman judge falls, all women judges fall; and
- that aspiring and younger women in the legal profession must dream boldly and not allow circumstances, social expectations, or institutional barriers to limit their ambitions, reaffirming that the Bench is not beyond their reach.

9. JUDICIARY AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The conference affirms:

- the role of the Judiciary as a catalyst for social change, interpreting and applying the law in a manner that advances and guarantees equity, the fundamental rights of all persons, especially women, children, and vulnerable groups;
- that judicial decisions should not only resolve disputes but should also shape jurisprudence that dismantles systemic barriers, discriminatory norms, and practices inconsistent with constitutional values; and
- the judiciary serves as the ultimate equalizer between the vulnerable and the powerful in the society.

On a lighter note; the Conference further resolved, in the spirit of fellowship and camaraderie, that the long-standing friendly feud regarding the superiority of Ghanaian and Nigerian jollof rice should remain unresolved.

Adoption

- Adopted unanimously by the General Assembly, IAWJ African Regional Conference 2026, Abuja, Nigeria.