

RECAP OF DAY TWO OF THE CONFERENCE

International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) African Regional Conference, Abuja, 2026

Standing on existing protocol.

It is my privilege to present the Recap of the proceedings of Day Two of the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) African Regional Conference held on Tuesday, 9th June 2026, at the Body of Benchers Complex, Abuja, FCT, Nigeria.

The Ceremony commenced at 9:50 a.m. with the rendition of the Nigerian National Anthem. The President of the National Association of Women Judges of Nigeria (NAWJN), Honourable Justice Monica B. Dongban-Mensem CFR, the President of the Court of Appeal CFR warmly welcomed Her Excellency First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, Honourable Justice Kudirat Motonmori Olatokunbo Kekere-Ekun, GCON, FNJI, Chief Justice of Nigeria, Chief Justices from member countries and all participants to the conference.

The NAWJN President anchored his opening remarks on the conference theme, **"Promoting Excellence in the Administration of Justice,"** and stressed the need for the judiciary to uphold the highest standards of integrity, competence, fairness, and accountability.

Justice Dongban-Mensem expressed confidence that the conference would generate meaningful partnerships and discussions capable of strengthening judicial institutions and advancing the rule of law throughout member nations.

His Lordship noted and expressed regret in the absence of delegates from Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo for reasons beyond their control.

Honourable Judge Mina Sougrati, President of the IAWJ, ably represented by Justice Binta Nyako, In his good will message, reaffirmed the Association's commitment to judicial independence and gender equality. Justice Sougrati also

commended women judges across Africa for strengthening public confidence in the judiciary and advancing justice for women, children, and vulnerable communities.

My Lord Binta Nyako took physical roll call of participants present from the Republic of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and a representative from the United Kingdom. Members from Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo joined virtually from their respective countries.

A goodwill message from Hon. Justice Martha K. Koome, EGH, Chief Justice and President of the Supreme Court of Kenya, was delivered by Lady Justice Susan Njoki Ndungu, of the Supreme Court of Kenya. He noted that through the association, women judges have a platform to exchange ideas and strengthen judicial institutions; advance gender equality; and reinforce the values upholding judicial independence and the rule of law.

Significantly, he announced Kenya's nomination of Honourable Lady Justice Njoki Ndungu as a candidate for election to the International Criminal Court and expressed the willingness and readiness of Kenya to support nominations of women judges from African countries into international organizations. Justice Koome concluded by expressing confidence in a new generation of African women judges who are mentoring others, shaping jurisprudence, and transforming societies.

The goodwill message of Prince Lateef Olasunkanmi Fagbemi, SAN, Attorney- General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, was delivered by Mrs. Beatrice Jadi Agba, Solicitor-General of the Federation.

He appreciated African women judges as active architects of jurisprudence who are shaping progressive African legal thought; dismantling systemic barriers; and advancing equality and gender justice. The Attorney-General highlighted Nigeria's commitment to judicial reforms, citing milestones reached to include the following:

- The appointment of Nigeria's first female Chief Justice and the current female Chief Justice of Nigeria;
- Female Presidents of the Court of Appeal; and
- Increased female representation across federal and state benches.

He also commended women judges for balancing judicial responsibilities with family and societal obligations while continuing to mentor future generations.

The goodwill message from His Excellency Ezenwo Nyesom Wike, CON, Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, was delivered by Salma

Dako, Esq. The Minister welcomed participants to Abuja and encouraged them to use the conference as a platform for mentoring the African girl-child, and assured delegates of the safety and hospitality of the Federal Capital Territory.

The Conference acknowledged and appreciated Goodwill messages from the First Lady of Imo State, Her Excellency Barrister Chioma Uzodinma; the Chief Judge of Cross River State, Honourable Justice Akon Ikpeme; and Barrister Mrs. Ngozi Ekeoma of Nepal Energies Ltd.

In her Special Remarks, Her Excellency Senator Oluremi Tinubu, CON, emphasized the unique role of women judges and the importance of maintaining judicial excellence. She encouraged women judges and legal practitioners to remain steadfast in promoting justice, equity, and the protection of vulnerable persons. The First Lady urged delegates to work toward building a judicial system that is transparent and firmly committed to the rule of law.

The Keynote Address was delivered by Honourable Justice Kudirat Kekere-Ekun, GCON, FNJI, FNIALS, Chief Justice of Nigeria. His Lordship described the conference theme as both timely and profound and noted the essential characteristics of judicial excellence. He observed that the authority of the judiciary rests fundamentally on public confidence, institutional integrity, impartiality, and fidelity to the law. He stressed the importance of ethical conduct, transparency, and accountability in sustaining that trust and emphasized that continuous learning is essential for judicial excellence and effective response to emerging legal challenges.

His Lordship highlighted the importance of conferences such as this in facilitating peer learning, exchange of best practices, and collective strengthening of justice systems across the continent. He called for deliberate efforts to mentor and support future generations of legal professionals.

His Lordship acknowledged the support of the First Lady of Nigeria towards the hosting of this conference. He recognised the Chief Justice of Kenya and other continental jurists, and commended Honourable Justice Monica B. Dongban- Mensem, the President and the NAWJN Executive for organizing the conference and formally declared the IAWJ African Regional Conference, 2026 open at 12:15pm

Tea Break was followed by an Energy Break at 12:55 p.m., enabling delegates to refresh and prepare for the plenary session that followed.

The **FIRST** Plenary Session titled: “**Judiciary as a Catalyst for Social Change: Implementing the IAWJ Principles,**” was presented by the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Honourable Justice Kudirat Motonmori Olatokunbo Kekere-Ekun, GCON and chaired by Honourable Justice Susan Njoki Ndungu of the Supreme Court of Kenya.

The session explored the transformative role of the judiciary in contemporary African societies and examined how the principles of the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) could be effectively implemented to advance gender equality, human rights, access to justice, and inclusive social development.

His Lordship highlighted the growing public demand for accountability, transparency, democratic governance, and the protection of fundamental rights amid challenges such as inequality, insecurity, technological disruption, and persistent discrimination. Within this context the judiciary was seen as a critical institution responsible for translating constitutional ideals into practical realities and ensuring that principles such as equality, dignity, liberty, and the rule of law are experienced by ordinary citizens in their daily lives.

Central to the Chief Justice’s presentation was the proposition that the judiciary remains one of the most powerful instruments for social transformation.

The presentation examined the role of the International Association of Women Judges as a global network dedicated to strengthening judicial institutions and promoting equal justice. He noted that through education, mentorship, and international collaboration, the Association has played a significant role in advancing inclusive and effective justice systems across jurisdictions.

A substantial portion of the presentation focused on the core values of the IAWJ and their practical application within African judicial systems. Gender equality was emphasized as both a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for sustainable social development. Courts were identified as important actors in dismantling discriminatory practices and advancing women’s rights.

Access to justice was portrayed as extending beyond the mere existence of courts to include the practical ability of individuals, especially the poor and vulnerable, to obtain legal remedies. The presentation recognized barriers such as cost, geographical distance, procedural complexity, and social

disadvantage, and highlighted the need for reforms designed to eliminate these obstacles. Examples from Nigeria, including judicial decisions protecting women's inheritance rights and institutional innovations such as gender-based violence desks, alternative dispute resolution illustrate how courts can directly influence social progress and public confidence in the justice system.

The discussion also addressed the judiciary's role in managing the relationship between cultural traditions and constitutional values. Courts were described as balancing respect for cultural diversity with the obligation to uphold equality, human dignity, and fundamental rights.

Particular attention was paid to the Women in Leadership in Law (WILIL) Programme, which was highlighted as an important initiative for developing judicial leadership among women.

Looking towards the future, the presentation identified emerging challenges such as technological advancement, artificial intelligence, climate change, privacy concerns, and transnational crime. These developments the paper noted require adaptability, continuous judicial education, enhanced cooperation among African judiciaries, and innovative approaches to adjudication.

To address these challenges, the Chief Justice proposed a comprehensive agenda that included strengthening judicial independence, expanding judicial education, promoting gender-sensitive adjudication, improving access to justice through technology and efficient case management, enhancing ethical accountability, encouraging women's leadership, and fostering regional collaboration among African judicial institutions.

The panel discussion enriched the session by providing comparative perspectives from Kenya, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire.

Justice Fatuma Sichale of **KENYA** described how the Kenyan Judiciary has embraced the IAWJ principles through jurisprudential developments, institutional reforms, specialized courts, gender-based violence initiatives, and the expansion of Small Claims Courts. He highlighted landmark decisions involving intersex rights, matrimonial property, cohabitation, and recognition of non-monetary contributions of full time wives in marriages, demonstrating how judicial innovation can respond to evolving social realities. She also

emphasized judicial welfare programmes and the importance of leadership development through initiatives such as WILIL.

The **GHANIAN** presentation similarly demonstrated how courts can drive social change through constitutional interpretation and the enforcement of rights. Examples included judicial decisions protecting access to justice, safeguarding human dignity, preventing discrimination in education, advancing gender equality in the distribution of matrimonial property, and protecting children's rights. The presenter highlighted the judiciary's role in balancing customary practices with constitutional guarantees while emphasizing the importance of judicial independence, integrity, accountability, and public trust.

The contribution from **Côte d'Ivoire** focused on the transformative potential of technology within judicial systems. The speaker highlighted the adoption of virtual hearings, online processing of certificates and identification documents, and the increasing use of digital tools to improve efficiency and accessibility. He encouraged women judges to embrace technology, participate actively in training and knowledge-sharing initiatives, and collaborate across jurisdictions through conferences and virtual platforms. His lordship's remarks emphasised organization, dedication, and regional cooperation as essential elements of effective judicial leadership.

The session concluded with an interactive question-and-answer segment addressing environmental regulation, intersex rights, and the role of technology in justice delivery.

The Chief Justice of Nigeria in his concluding remarks reaffirmed the commitment of the Nigerian judiciary to gender equality, women's rights, and the broader principles of the IAWJ. The plenary ultimately reinforced the shared conviction that African judiciaries possess the capacity to act as powerful agents of social transformation by safeguarding constitutional values, protecting vulnerable populations, strengthening democratic institutions, and ensuring equal access to justice.

Overall, the session presented a compelling vision of the judiciary as a constitutional guardian and catalyst for social change, capable of advancing equality, human rights, accountability, and democratic governance throughout Africa.

The Conference adjourned for Lunch at 2:30 PM. Delegates enjoyed a sumptuous luncheon, which also provided an opportunity for bilateral discussions and networking among participants from across the continent.

The day's proceedings were brought to a convivial conclusion with a Cocktail Reception held from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM at the Court of Appeal Headquarters, Abuja. The reception was well-attended by delegates, dignitaries, and guests, and provided a warm and celebratory atmosphere that underscored the spirit of collegiality and fellowship at the heart of the IAWJ family.

The opening proceedings reaffirmed the collective commitment of African judiciaries and their partners to strengthening the administration of justice, Promoting the rule of law, and advancing the leadership of women within the justice sector.

Day Two of the IAWJ African Regional Conference 2026 successfully set the tone for robust engagement on judicial excellence, gender equality, judicial independence, technological advancement, mentorship, and continental cooperation.

Thank you for listening.