

## **SPEECH OF GUEST SPEAKER AT THE NAJUC ANNUAL LECTURE.**

### **JUDICIAL REFORMS: STRENGTHENING THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE IN NIGERIA THROUGH TECHNOLOGY, INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE, MEDIA, AND PUBLIC FEEDBACK.**

**Good morning, distinguished guests, esteemed members of the National Association of Judicial Correspondents, and other valued attendees.**

I will not attempt to establish any formal protocol, as every individual present here is deserving of recognition and respect.

It came as a pleasant surprise to receive the invitation to deliver this lecture at the 16th Annual Lecture of this highly regarded body. I am deeply honored to be addressing you today.

#### **Introduction**

The theme for this year's lecture could not be more timely—particularly given the ongoing scrutiny and criticism that our beloved judiciary has endured in recent months.

The topic, *"Strengthening the Administration of Justice Through Technology, International Best Practice, Media, and Public Feedback,"* touches on some of the most pressing and transformative elements within our legal system today.

I have been provided with suggested areas to consider in the course of this lecture. While I will reference them, my principal focus will be the role of the media—especially judicial correspondents—and its dynamic relationship with the judiciary.

There is no doubt that the media is a powerful holds immense power: to inform, to reform, and—if misused—to mislead or damage. In the realm of justice, the media serves as a critical guardian of transparency, fairness, and the rule of law. Its ability to shape public opinion and promote accountability across all branches of government cannot be understated.

I will however focus on the **sympiotic relationship** between media and the judiciary. Both institutions depend on each other to fulfill their respective mandates. However, like all relationships, this one brings in its wake, peculiar advantages and and challenges.

For the purposes of this lecture, the term *"media"* encompasses the diverse channels through which information is communicated to the public. These include traditional outlets such as newspapers, radio, and television, as well as digital media—social platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it underscores the vast and influential reach of the media, regardless of whether the said information is true or false.

A single well-crafted article can profoundly influence public opinion—even among the most skeptical audiences. In the digital era, media is not just a tool; it is a force. The importance of the media cannot therefore be underrated. Whether we like it or not, digital media being one

of the most recent forms of information communication, has become a worldwide accepted method for the dispensation of information.

The last election in the United States serves as a notable example of how digital platforms now define political discourse, public engagement and ultimately election decisions. Candidates like Donald Trump and Kamala Harris effectively leveraged social media to communicate with voters and campaign aggressively. The wide coverage and attendant impact inevitably formed significant impressions on the voting public. Many years ago, such methods would have been deemed to be preposterous. Evidently, what was once unconventional is now mainstream.

Here in Nigeria, we are not exempt from this global shift. The influence of digital media has grown to the extent that legislative proposals have emerged seeking to regulate online bloggers by requiring them to have a fixed physical address. This of course may be explained as an attempt to ensure accountability of the media; it seems more likely however to be an attempt to “gag” their operations. I am hopeful that this type of Bill will not see the light of day. To pass such a Bill will have a negative effect on the right of the public to information. While accountability is important, such efforts often raise serious concerns about freedom of expression and access to information.

Everyone in this hall is aware that there is an urgent need to strengthen the administration of justice in Nigeria. Public trust in the system has waned, and rightfully so. However, rebuilding this trust is a collective effort. Government, the judiciary, legal practitioners, and—importantly—the media all have essential roles to play. Judicial correspondents, in particular, carry a sensitive responsibility and role in this journey feat.

In this paper, I outline key areas that I hope will be of help to the media in the dispensation of their duties. Neither the judiciary nor the correspondents who cover its judgments and administrative actions will be able to compete with the best international practices if they fail to study and adopt recent developments across the global world. Some of these practices have visibly enhanced the delivery of justice all over the world. I will consider a few of these. One of the most impactful avenues for reform is through technology, which has the potential to drastically improve judicial efficiency.

## **The Role of Technology in the Administration of Justice**

It goes without saying that the Nigerian Courts and the Nigerian Bar have a duty to ensure that the use of technology is employed to enhance the administration of justice. International best practices must be studied and adapted, bearing in mind our cultural and infrastructural realities.

Our courts face a range of systemic challenges, including case backlogs, delayed trials, and inefficient case management. Technology can—and should—be employed to mitigate these issues.

I am proud to state that Nigerian Courts, especially the Lagos State Judiciary have taken bold steps in embracing the use of technology both in the Courts and in the Registries. The Lagos State Judiciary has truly made commendable progress in this regard. Hearings are held virtually and recorded. Judgments are delivered virtually. Where transcribers are needed, they are employed. I am also aware that virtual hearings are conducted from prisons, where it has become impractical to transport some prisoners. Indeed, the courts all have IT departments.

Nonetheless, there is still considerable work to be done. Some of the urgent reforms needed are as follows:

1. **Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)**, particularly Mediation ought to be done virtually. Thankfully, with the Covid era, virtual courtrooms were established all over the world. Nigeria was not completely left behind. However, the incessant power outage and internet failures have adversely affected the smooth running of these virtual proceedings.
2. **Digital Training:** Both senior and junior judicial staff in the federal and state governments must undergo regular digital literacy training. Manual transcription should be replaced with automated transcription tools. There are so many software applications that carry out these functions flawlessly.
3. **Infrastructure & Policy:** The Government should adopt an approach that will consist of technology integration, with the attendant requirement of an adequate infrastructure in place. Government should introduce and supervise policies that promote the promotion of technology in the judicial space. The National Judicial Council (NJC) has the responsibility to ensure that this is carried out. This is the body that supervises and oversees the judiciary and judicial officers all over the country. For optimum performance, this is a necessity and not a luxury.
4. **State Judicial Commissions:** These bodies must create and enforce forward-thinking and sustainable policies that support the adoption and enhancement of technology within the judiciary. It is no news that the justice system, in the eyes of the public and its users, is nowhere near the International Best Practices standard.
5. **Digital Evidence:** The handling of evidence must be digitized. The recent fire at the Probate Registry—where original Wills were destroyed—highlights the urgent need for secure digital backups. The physical storage of court documents or registry documents is archaic and should not be used at all, or at the very least must have digital backups.
6. **Paperless Trials:** It is time for Nigeria to adopt paperless trials. Courts should operate with pre-filed digital pleadings and allow for electronic tendering of evidence where appropriate.
7. **Fully Online Filing:** The Current system allows for online case filings but still require physical payment of filing fees. This defeats the whole purpose. This hybrid model must evolve into a seamless digital process. Courts and their registries should strive to attain a fully digitalized filing of matters and the attendant processes. This method also curbs corruption in the Registries, which unfortunately still exists.
8. **Case Tracking:** Allowing parties to track the progress of their cases online promotes transparency, reduces physical court visits, and eliminates administrative bottlenecks. Court registrars with the appropriate training should be able to upload the status of the case and notify parties of any new developments or upcoming dates.
9. **Global Best Practices:** Countries such as Estonia offer exemplary models of fully digitized judicial systems which include e-filing of cases, virtual hearings and digital

access to court records. Singapore has the same practice with a full online dispute resolution system Nigeria can—and should—aspire to similar standards, beginning at the state level and then the federal courts and appellate courts can initiate similar practices.

## **The Role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Judicial Proceedings**

This is a topic that is currently generating a lot of controversy.

I have chosen this topic in order to highlight the advantages, limitations and parameters of the use of AI in the legal space.

AI is rapidly becoming a transformative tool in the legal sector. From research and document analysis to prediction models and case law referencing, AI holds promise—but also poses risks. In 2023, a Colombian judge, Hon. Juan Garcia, used ChatGPT in a ruling. He used ChatGPT to answer a question posed to it, and he thereafter included the answer, verbatim in his Ruling. Interestingly, the use of GPT is not forbidden in Columbian law, where this decision was made. While the judge clarified that AI did not replace his reasoning, the decision underscored AI's emerging role in legal discourse.

However, caution is necessary. AI platforms like ChatGPT have limitations. They can produce biased or inaccurate results because the language model holds no actual understanding of the text. It should therefore not be relied upon for consequential decision-making without verification.

Indeed, ChatGPT's creators, OpenAI have pointed out that the tool still has significant limitations and should not be used for consequential decision- making.

This caveat above, in my view, should be the safe position for the use of AI, in both the Judicial reasoning and legal research

In a recent Judgment this month, a High Court Judge in the United Kingdom, made scathing remarks about a lawyer who submitted fake cases in support of his case. The Hon Justice Ritchie stated thus:

*“On the balance of probabilities, I consider that it would have been negligent for this barrister, if she used AI and did not check it, to put the text into her pleading”.*

This position indeed captures the correct attitude towards the use of AI, in judicial matters.

As far as Nigeria is concerned, the “jury is still out” on this practice. I am however convinced that most lawyers and judges make use of these tools from time to time.

That said, AI has legitimate value in administrative tasks—such as sorting emails, texts, and court documents—and in supporting legal research. Tools like Everlaw, LawGeex, and Ross Intelligence are already in use globally by legal practitioners and judicial officers. The use of AI, in the Courts' administrative duties if used properly, can save a lot of time and unnecessary use of manpower.

There is, however, a caveat. Not all legal information derived from AI platforms is accurate. It has been shown that some legal authorities have been misquoted like the example given

above or become obsolete. Users must therefore be cautious in adopting the information therein, hook, line and sinker.

My humble view on this topic is that, whether we like it or not, AI has come to stay. Furthermore, like all new practices, theories and ideologies, there are the negatives and the positives. Our duty is to seek its advantages and put them to use. There was an era when people were very reluctant to use laptops and computers to deliver speeches, training and judgments. But look where we are now!

In 2025, Nigeria has become one of the leading IT countries in Africa. Almost every training, examination, news report etc is done digitally. Many Judges write and deliver Judgments from their laptops, Court proceedings are done virtually when necessary and unfortunately, only when there is power and a working Internet service.

I cannot but mention the impact of AI in the Arbitration space. Arbitration has always been my passion; indeed, I had become a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (UK) even before I became a Judge. The use of AI in Arbitral proceedings has slowly but surely crept in. It has even become necessary for the Headquarters of the Institute to issue a set of Guidelines on its use to enable practitioners to navigate the complexities of integrating AI into practice. I can confirm that the approach is similar to that of the Courts. A cautious acceptance of its use with attention to its limitations and dangers has been encouraged.

Administratively, AI is an excellent tool to both the arbitration practitioners and the Tribunal

### **The Role of the Media in Judicial Reporting**

This segment is particularly relevant to many of you in this room. Indeed, majority of the attendees here are somewhat related to judicial journalism.

In jurisdictions like Nigeria, where most of the population lacks direct access to court proceedings, the media plays a vital role in informing the public. Judicial correspondents serve as the bridge between the courts and the people.

Their role is twofold: to inform, and to act as watchdogs.

In Nigeria—and indeed across many African nations—the media has historically served as a tool for exposing judicial inefficiencies, abuses, and injustices, while also highlighting commendable judgments and legal reforms.

However, it is no secret that a degree of friction and mistrust exists between the judiciary and the media. There have been numerous instances of inaccurate or biased reporting of court proceedings. Likewise, speculative reporting on ongoing litigation has sometimes undermined trust in both the judiciary and the media itself.

In this address, I aim to shed light on the responsibilities and boundaries of judicial correspondents, as well as the importance of integrity and diligence in their work

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I have attempted to highlight what exactly the role and responsibilities of the media should be.

## **1. Awareness and Self Education**

Every judicial correspondent must possess a foundational understanding of the law and judicial knowledge. Conferences such as this one are invaluable, but thankfully, the availability of legal resources online makes continuous learning easier than ever. There are numerous non-degree legal courses online that can greatly enhance a correspondent's competence. For those who do not wish to take any exams, there is enough material out there which suffices.

Legal correspondents have the critical responsibility of translating complex legal jargon into accessible, accurate narratives—without oversimplifying or misrepresenting key details. This knowledge is important because judicial correspondents have a duty to educate the public through concise yet accurate summaries and analyses of court judgments, legal procedures, and legislation.

In covering high-profile cases—especially those involving public sentiment or national interest—objectivity and accuracy must be non-negotiable. This becomes more compelling when there is a nationwide bias towards one of the parties. This also applies to journalists involved in televised broadcasts and legal discussion forums. There is wide coverage of these television shows. Some of these correspondents are so well-informed that they are often mistaken for legal practitioners. Personally, I find several of these correspondents' analyses, publications and interviews insightful and engaging.

## **2. Transparency and Accountability through Responsible Media**

A vibrant and well-informed media can promote transparency and accountability within the judiciary. Consistent, unbiased, and professional reporting can act as a deterrent to judicial misconduct or delays, and even spotlight inefficiencies such as court backlogs or administrative corruption—issues that often begin at the registries.

Globally, we've seen the media function as a check on both executive and judicial power. Once trust is earned, the media becomes a powerful catalyst for judicial and institutional reform.

There is however a downside to this powerful tool falling into the hands of the wrong judicial reporter because power wielded irresponsibly can be harmful. There have been some very damaging reports which have caused a lot of damage.

I recall a situation in which a disgruntled litigant orchestrated the publication of a defamatory article against a judge—someone I know personally. If not for the judge's doggedness and integrity, it would have ended up badly. However, they picked the wrong person! She promptly took the paper/ magazine to court, only to find out that it was one of these unidentifiable outfits that people hide behind to vent their frustration. The reporter behind the article was identified, and apparently, he is now trying to settle out of court, rather than having to face a heavy punitive fine in damages for libel.

Such instances underscore the importance of caution and accuracy. Judicial correspondents need to be extremely careful. Inaccurate reporting can distort public perception, apply undue pressure on agencies like the police or prosecution, and undermine the justice system.

### 3. Investigative Reporting

Investigative reporting remains one of the most significant aspects of judicial correspondence. This form of journalism demands passion, persistence, and patience. The impact may not be immediate, but over time, such efforts can bring about meaningful change.

Examples abound—cases involving drug cartels, human trafficking, political corruption, and financial crimes have all come to light through investigative journalism. Globally, journalists like Emmy Award-winning Katie Polglase exemplify this practice. If you read about her, you will get a clearer picture of what this type of journalism entails. Locally, we have commendable figures such as Musikilu Mojeed, the Editor in Chief at Nigeria's Premium Times, Fisayo Soyombo (the founder of the Foundation for Investigative Journalism), and many others, some of whom are likely present in this hall.

Of course, this type of journalism carries significant risk. Only recently, one such journalist was unlawfully detained. However, as the saying goes: *"No risk, no gain!"*

## **Challenges and Concerns in Judicial Reporting**

Every coin has two sides. As I pointed out earlier, the media particularly judicial correspondents wield enormous influence—their work can enlighten or mislead, uplift or destroy. It is essential to acknowledge some common pitfalls.

### 1. Biased vs. Balanced Reporting

Reports on judicial matters must be accurate, impartial, and free from sensationalism. Unfortunately, due to the very nature of Nigerians, there's often a tendency towards emotional and exaggerated storytelling. This must be avoided.

Emotionally charged words are also to be avoided. For instance, someone charged with an offence is neither a convict nor a judgment debtor. Mislabeling them violates journalistic ethics and legal standards. The report must be objective and there should be no room for drama. Drama provokes outrage, fear or excitement. Correspondents must present multiple credible viewpoints, refrain from speculation, and clearly state when details remain unclear. There should be no room for speculation.

A typical example of speculative reporting involves proposed Bills in the National Assembly. Often, before a Bill has even passed its first reading, reports claim that it has been passed into law. This misleads the public and creates confusion.

### 2. Sensationalized Headlines

Sensationalized headlines should be avoided and left to the soft publications and articles contained in society magazines that focus on storytelling and attention seeking headlines. Legal issues ought to be devoid of levity. One of the main consequences of sensational headlines or reporting is the tendency to mislead and prejudice the reader. Trial by the Media is not acceptable!

I am not unaware of the need to maximize the sales and expand the coverage of the reports, whether by hard copies or soft copies. Correspondents should, however, not sacrifice accuracy and fairness on the altar of sales and profit making.

### **3. Legal and Ethical Constraints**

There is a delicate balance between the public's right to know and an individual's right to privacy and a fair trial. Crossing this line exposes journalists to legal liabilities such as ethical complaints, defamation or contempt of court.

It is imperative to remember that once a case is *sub judice*, journalists must refrain from reporting details that could influence ongoing proceedings. There must be no speculation or criticism in the public domain. This preserves judicial integrity and protects the rights of all involved. Investigative and judicial reporters must respect the right to a fair trial, ensuring that pre-publication scrutiny does not prejudice ongoing proceedings.

It is bad enough that some lawyers seek public accolade by talking to the press and generally playing to the gallery. I implore all the judicial correspondents, not to get caught up in this practice. Undoubtedly, there is the expectation of minimal coverage of the proceedings and description of the parties. After the case has been decided, one way or the other, the correspondents can give a detailed summary with balanced, accurate and objective views.

Importantly, before a judicial story or case law is published, the correspondent must ensure that he or she has verified the publication.

### **4. Confidentiality and Source Protection**

The media's ability to protect sources is a valued privilege—but one that must be exercised responsibly because it can be abused. Journalists must ensure that source protection does not conflict with legal obligations, especially where court-ordered disclosures are concerned.

At this juncture, it is necessary to bring up the issue of whistleblowers in the Nigerian legal space. The issue of whistleblowers is particularly sensitive in Nigeria. While they are essential in exposing judicial corruption or negligence, they often lack adequate protection. Moreover, malicious individuals sometimes pose as whistleblowers with the sole aim of tarnishing reputations.

We must promote and protect genuine whistleblowing while discouraging its abuse. Civil society must play a role in this effort by demanding integrity and fairness in both reporting and the judicial process, they must remain a responsible, unbiased watchdog over the judicial process in the country.

The National Assembly also requires scrutiny. Many proposed Bills serve narrow interests rather than the common good and are sponsored by people who only have their own sectionalized interests at heart. Therefore, bills that are to be passed into law must

be well considered by the public and the members of the National Assembly. The media must ensure the public is kept informed and actively engaged in legislative processes.

## **5. Legal Terminology**

Not every journalist is equipped to be a judicial correspondent. Judicial correspondents need to have a strong grasp of legal terms and procedures. Misunderstanding basic legal terms can cause serious misinformation. For example, “dismissal” and “striking out” are not synonymous, yet they are often used interchangeably. Correspondents must ensure that the correct proceeding or ruling is captured.

Similarly, referring to an accused person as a "convict" before a verdict is both unethical and legally incorrect. A clear understanding of legal terms is non-negotiable. We all know that a Defendant is not a convict until he is found guilty by the Court and not the press!

## **6. Ongoing Self-Education**

Journalists must constantly familiarize themselves with fundamental laws of the country, starting with the Nigerian Constitution, followed by laws relating to defamation, contempt of court, and libel. Continuous training and education are essential.

On a lighter note, correspondents should also dress professionally, especially when covering court proceedings. We all know that the courtroom is a sober place. Correspondents should be smart and proud of their appearance and profession. A polished appearance earns respect and certainly reflects the seriousness of their profession.

## **Public Feedback**

The Nigerian judiciary remains under intense public scrutiny. Social media platforms are awash with self-acclaimed judicial analysts, bloggers, commentators, detractors and, regrettably, haters as well. Despite this, they have a large audience, so these voices influence public perception—often shaping narratives without factual basis. Topics that stir significant public interest include human rights violations, judicial independence, government policies, and legal reforms.

As a developing democracy, Nigeria requires active, constructive engagement from the public. Consequently, judicial correspondents must rise to the challenge by engaging with the public, responding to legitimate inquiries, and publishing informed legal opinions from qualified professionals. Nigerians have a strong appetite for diverse opinions, whether in print or online. Television broadcasts also remain an effective way to disseminate accurate legal information.

Indeed, we’ve all witnessed situations where public outcry—especially in the face of human rights violations or questionable policies—has forced the government to reverse course. Activists and journalists wrongly detained have been released as a direct result of media coverage and civic engagement. That said, we still have much ground to cover.

To improve feedback management, I recommend setting up a dedicated email address to receive and respond to legal questions and opinions. Additionally, social media platforms should be actively monitored to prevent the spread of misinformation and to flag defamatory or hate-driven content.

## **Conclusion**

Finally, I will like to conclude by extending my sincere thanks to NAJUC for inviting me to share my thoughts on this crucial subject. I hope that the ideas and observations I have offered today will prove useful to your work.

You play an incredibly important role, one that requires commitment, vigilance, and constant self-improvement. I encourage you to continue in your pursuit of truth, fairness, and excellence in judicial reporting. Your relevance is increasing, and your contributions are more vital than ever.

I thank you once again.