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**TOPIC: ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN NIGERIA: THE CHALLENGES,
OPPORTUNITIES AND THE FUTURE OF LEGAL PRACTICE.**

COURTESIES

Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a profound honour to stand before you today, to speak on a subject that strikes at the very heart of our democracy and country as well as development: **Access to Justice in Nigeria: Challenges, Opportunities, and the Future of Legal Practice.**

For over twenty-five years of consistent legal practice, I have witnessed firsthand, the triumph, challenges and failures of the Nigerian justice system. I have seen justice being perverted by the political class; members of the society and the rich; to mention just a few. I have witnessed judges and political leaders who use the instrumentalities of the law as a tool of oppression and intimidation. And I have experienced the life-changing power of favourable and good judgments. This experience fuels my conviction that the topic before us, Access to Justice in Nigeria: The Challenges, Opportunities and the Future of Legal Practice is not merely an academic topic; it is significant to our democracy, our development, and our collective humanity; among others.

2. DEFINITION OF TERMS:

WHAT IS JUSTICE?

Before we dissect the challenges and prospects of access to justice, it is pertinent to establish a common understanding of the core concept in this topic: 'Justice'. Justice is a term often mentioned but less frequently defined with precision.

I. ARISTOTELIAN DEFINITION:

Aristotle distinguished between distributive justice (which is explained as fair allocation of societal benefits and burdens) and corrective justice (which focuses on the rectification of wrongs between individuals). In the Nigerian context, justice is primarily and often seen as 'corrective justice' – the ability to seek redress for grievances or wrongs.

II. LEGAL/PROCEDURAL JUSTICE:

Procedural justice focuses on the fairness of processes or procedures used in adjudication system. Lon Fuller, famously explained and opined that, law must be prospective, clear, non-contradictory, possible to follow, stable, and congruent with official action. Therefore, justice requires strict adherence to procedural safeguards to be meaningful.

III. SUBSTANTIVE JUSTICE:

This concerns with the fairness of outcomes. It focuses on achieving fair and just outcomes in legal proceedings, emphasizing the content and merits of a case over procedural technicalities. It seeks to ensure that justice is served based on the

substance of the law and the facts of a case, rather than just adhering to strict procedural rules.

In a nutshell, justice is the principle of fairness, morality and equity in the application of laws, rules, and social norms, ensuring that individuals receive what they deserve or have a right to, based on the facts, evidence, and relevant circumstances.

This definition encompasses various aspects of justice, including distributive justice (fair distribution of resources), procedural justice (fairness in procedures) and restorative justice (reforming and rehabilitating persons.)

3. ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Access to Justice is defined as ‘the ability of all people to seek and obtain effective remedies through accessible, affordable, impartial, efficient, effective, and culturally competent institutions of justice’ (Agrast et al. 2012/2013). According to Sabatino, access to justice is ‘the core element’ of the rule of law and the rule of law is a sister concept to access to justice (Sabatino 2020). The elements of access to justice, include: knowledge of rights and responsibilities and of systems for redress, both formal and informal; the ability to access those systems and to participate effectively in order to achieve a just outcome on the basis of rules or legal principles in accordance with the rule of law.

Therefore, there is access to justice in a country, when people, can pursue their goals and address their law-related problems in ways that are consistent with fair legal standards and processes, and when they can

obtain, understand, and act on information and services related to the law, where necessary, to achieve just outcomes.

There are fundamental principles on which the concept of access to justice is based. These fundamental principles, can be found in various literatures and documentations, and they are listed as follows:

- I. Access to justice is a *constitutional and fundamental rights* of each citizen.
- II. Interests of *citizens* should predominate in policies on access to justice, not interests of providers of services.
- III. The goal of justice is not only procedural justice but *also substantive justice*.
- IV. Citizens are to be provided with *legal assistance within the legal system* both in civil and in criminal law matters.
- V. Access to justice requires policies that deploy *every possible means* towards attaining the goal, including reform of substantive law, judicial procedure, legal education, legal information, and legal services.
- VI. Policies on legal services must deploy a “portfolio” approach of a *wide range of provisions and arrangements*, some publicly funded and some not, some provided by lawyers and some not.
- VII. Programs and reforms must take account of the realistic level of *resources*, but these should be seen as limiting policies rather than defining them.
- VIII. Within civil law, more attention should be given to the particular legal needs of *poor people* excluded from legal aid.
- IX. The full potential of *technological advances* must be harnessed.
- X. The rule of law must be allowed to thrive

For the sake of emphasis, the right of access to justice is a fundamental right of citizens. It seeks to enable citizens to exercise their autonomy to choose, modify, and realize their full potential in a just, fair and equitable manner. Liberal democracies rely on these rights to protect citizens' abilities to realize their individual autonomy. The right of access to justice allows individuals to turn to an impartial third party to resolve conflicts and if individuals cannot access the administrative and judicial bodies created by the State for this purpose, their rights cannot be protected. If the design, procedure, and outcomes of these institutions are inefficient, then rights are reduced to rules and principles on paper, rather than in action.

Access to justice, therefore, has consequences not only for the public sphere, but also for the private sphere in a liberal society. This right protects the capacity that all people have to create and materialize their individual and collective identities. Unresolved conflicts impede this process, and prevent people from realizing their potential as moral agents.

Access to justice also has the objective of guaranteeing that no member of the political community is excluded from or marginalized in the public sphere and that everyone is able to participate effectively in the political realm.

In the state of nature, there is no certainty on how problems affecting individual persons, or property of individuals should be resolved. Problems are usually resolved through violence. Thomas Hobbes opined that life in the state of nature was 'nasty, shortish and brutish'. The creation of an impartial third party who can resolve conflicts peacefully is one of the main objectives of the move from the state of nature to the civil state.

The state, in the form of judicial and administrative bodies, has the power to resolve conflicts in a legitimate and definitive manner. The adjudication of rights by judges or administrative bodies allows individuals to protect themselves from the undue interventions of third persons. If individuals cannot access an impartial third party to protect their rights, they will be, in practice, second-class citizens. For example, if individuals cannot exercise their political rights, they will not be able to participate effectively in the public life. If they cannot express their ideas, vote, or circulate freely, they cannot be full members of the political community. If they cannot access the basic material conditions that are necessary to exercise their autonomy, they will not be able to participate in the public sphere, and their ability to improve their lives in the private sphere may be compromised. Violations of these rights can only be legitimately curbed through the intervention of the judicial branch or administrative agencies.

The right of access to justice, therefore, allows the individual to put the state apparatus in motion to stop these violations by means of an official statement declaring their existence, demanding that they be stopped, and punishing the offender or compensating the victim. In the event that the transgressor does not act in accordance with the legal mandate, the right of access to justice demands that the coercive apparatus of the State be put in motion. State power may intervene legitimately so that the decision of the judicial or administrative body becomes reality.

The right to have a lawyer is one of the key dimensions of the right of access to justice. Legal representation serves an important role for both citizens and liberal democracies. The highly technical character of modern legal systems often, however, creates a sizeable distance between the law and the private

citizens. The majority of people do not have the knowledge or skills to manipulate legal tools or the specialized knowledge necessary to interact with the state judicial apparatus nor do the majority of people have any familiarity with the substantive law or the procedures that would allow them to reach common, valuable results in a democratic and liberal State.

As a matter of fact, access to justice stands for a durable system of laws, institutions, norms, and community commitment that delivers four universal principles:

- I. Accountability; the government as well as private actors are accountable under the law.
- II. Just law; the law is clear, publicized, and stable and is applied evenly. It ensures human rights as well as property, contract, and procedural rights.
- III. Open government; the processes by which the law is adopted, administered, adjudicated, and enforced are accessible, fair, and efficient.
- IV. Accessible and impartial justice; justice is delivered timely by competent, ethical, and independent representatives.

4. ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS:

Article 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states thus: "Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law."

Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to

which Nigeria is a party, elaborates on the right to a fair and public hearing. Section 36 (1) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria provides inter alia: “In the determination of his civil rights and obligations including any question or determination by or against any government or authority, a person shall be entitled to a fair hearing within a reasonable time by a court or other tribunal established by law and constituted in such manner as to secure its independence and impartiality”. Access to justice is thus a fundamental human right, not a privilege.

Therefore, Access to Justice means that all people, regardless of status, wealth, location, or education, must be able to:

- a) Seek legal redress effectively by knowing their rights and finding legal help.
- b) Access the formal and informal justice mechanisms like courts, police stations, and ADR centers.
- c) Use these mechanisms effectively in such a way that they are affordable, procedurally easy, and devoid of intimidation.
- d) Obtain a fair, timely, and enforceable outcome based on law and evidence.

5. ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN NIGERIA

Let us be brutally honest, access to justice in Nigeria remains, for the vast majority, a difficulty and a mirage. The challenges facing the justice sector in Nigeria are deeply entrenched, formidable and daunting:

I. PROHIBITIVE COST:

Legal services are absurdly expensive in Nigeria. Filing fees, lawyer's fees, service fees, and incidental costs place justice beyond the reach of the average Nigerian. Incidental costs including transportation (often repeated journeys), accommodation near courts, cost of obtaining documents (police reports, medical reports), service of processes. Hidden Costs are also substantial including: lost income due to time spent pursuing justice, unofficial "facilitation" payments.

Legal Aid, though noble in intent, is chronically underfunded and overstretched, reaching only a tiny fraction of those in need. For the poor, justice is often a luxury they cannot afford. The noble Legal Aid Council Act is crippled by chronic, severe underfunding. Its reach is microscopic compared to the need. It often lacks resources for expert witnesses, investigations, and even basic transportation for lawyers to prisons or rural courts. Pro bono efforts by lawyers, while commendable, are ad hoc and insufficiently coordinated or supported by the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) or the state.

II. DELAY:

The single most obvious hinderance to access to justice in Nigeria is the palpable, noticeable and discernible level of delays experienced in the Nigerian court systems. It is disappointing and highly embarrassing to see that it takes an average of sixteen to twenty years to successfully prosecute a case from the lowest court to the highest court in Nigeria. Empirically speaking, the case of Central Bank of Nigeria v Mrs. Agnes Igwilo (SC 83/2002) was prosecuted from the Federal High Court of Nigeria to the Supreme Court for 16 solid years. Dr. Victor Igwilo was a staff of the Central

Bank of Nigeria and he was dismissed from his appointment. He initiated a civil action against the Central Bank of Nigeria at the Federal High Court seeking reliefs that his dismissal was null and void; he prayed for reinstatement to his appointment and payment of all his salaries from the date of termination of appointment to the date of judgment and thereafter. The case lasted for 16 years from the trial court to the Supreme Court of Nigeria. Unfortunately, before judgment was delivered at the Supreme Court; he had died and he could not live to see the end of the case. The name of Dr. Victor Igwilo's wife, Mrs. Agnes Igwilo was thereafter substituted for that of his husband at the Supreme Court.

Nigerian courts are crippled by rampant delays which militate against access to justice. Overburdened dockets, frequent adjournments (sometimes for administrative convenience), cumbersome procedures, thus creating a system where cases routinely span years. Litigants suffer immense psychological and financial strain. This erodes public confidence fundamentally. Nigerian procedural laws are unnecessarily complex, cumbersome and lengthy. Witnesses die or disappear, evidence deteriorates, memories fade, litigants suffer psychological trauma and financial ruin. Public confidence evaporates. May I crave your indulgence to the lamentation of judges in cases like *A.G. Lagos State v. Dosunmu* (1989) 3 NWLR (Pt. 111) 552 and *Federal Medical Centre, Ido-Ekiti v Dr. T.G Yekeen* on the societal cost of delay in litigation in Nigeria.

In the case of *Hon. Muiwa Inakoju & 17 Ors v. Hon. Abraham Adeleke & 3 ORS* SC. 272/2006); the appellant fought the case on preliminary objection from the High Court to the Supreme Court. By the time the case was completed at the Supreme Court, the tenure of Governor Ladoja had been completed and he got an empty victory.

III. COMPLEXITY OF PROCEDURES AND LACK OF LEGAL AWARENESS:

Our laws and procedures are very complex and technical. The average citizen lacks basic understanding of their rights and how to enforce them. Legal literacy campaigns are disjointed and insufficient. This knowledge gap leaves millions vulnerable to exploitation and unable to navigate the system.

Our legal system, inherited and adapted, remains complex, technical, and often inaccessible to the layperson. Legal language (legalese) is a significant barrier. The vast majority of Nigerians lack basic knowledge of their fundamental rights as enshrined in Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution or how to enforce them. They don't know where to go or what to do when wronged.

Government and NGO efforts are deficient, under-resourced, and often fail to reach the most vulnerable populations in languages and formats they understand. This knowledge gap renders millions powerless and exploitable.

IV. PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION:

While some judicial officers and lawyers uphold the highest integrity in the justice system, the perception of the public about lawyers and judges in recent times is very poor. Emerging instances of bribery, influence peddling, and unethical practices, though perhaps not the majority, severely damage public trust and deter people from seeking legal remedies. It poisons the well of justice.

These instances of bribery (monetary or otherwise), influence peddling, nepotism, and outright judicial or prosecutorial misconduct, inflict catastrophic injury on the justice system. It undermines fairness, perverts outcomes, and destroys trust. Public

perception about Nigerian election jurisprudence and justice system is not only debilitating poor; Nigerian citizens have zero confidence in the judicial system when it comes to election matters. This perception is fueled by glaring and proven allegations of corruption against some judges, judicial officers and lawyers. In *London Metropolitan Railway v Lannon* (1969) 1 Q.B 577; Lord Denning MR opined thus: ‘Justice is rooted in confidence and confidence is destroyed when an average person sees that the judge is biased’.

IV. INADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND TECHNOLOGY:

Manual filing systems, poor record-keeping, limited internet access in courts, and lack of case management software contribute massively to inefficiency and delay in Nigerian courts. The justice system operates largely in the analogue age while the world has moved on.

Many courts lack reliable internet, email, or even functional recording systems. E-filing is just beginning and inconsistent.

VI. POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT CHALLENGES:

Ladies and gentlemen, any discussion on access to justice in Nigeria is incomplete without a critical and unflinching examination of the role of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) in access to justice. The Nigerian Police Force is the primary state agents that citizens encounter when seeking justice for crimes and other forms of violations. Tragically, they often represent the first and most significant barrier. The police are responsible for:

Receiving and recording complaints.

Investigating crimes.

Arresting suspects.

Granting or refusing bail.

Preparing case files for prosecution.

Protecting citizens and property.

The effectiveness of the police and its integrity at this initial stage fundamentally determine whether a victim can even begin the journey towards justice.

Issues of arbitrary arrest, detention, extortion, and poor investigation techniques block the path to justice at its very origin. Reforming law enforcement is inextricably linked to improving access. Some of the problems militating against the efficiency and effectiveness of the Nigerian Police Force are hereinunder discussed:

Refusal to Register Complaints. A widespread practice, especially against the poor, women, or those reporting crimes by powerful individuals is the trend of refusing to accept and register complaints of the poor by the police. Victims are turned away at police stations without entries mostly when the perpetrators of crimes are politicians and rich. This gesture extinguishes access to justice at the very first step.

Arbitrary Arrest and Detention: Arrests without reasonable suspicion, often based on mere allegations, vendettas, or for extortion is another ugly trend in the Nigerian criminal justice system. Section 36 (5) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria bothering on presumption of innocence of any person alleged of committing crimes is routinely violated. In *Onome Ojomo v. Commissioner of Police* (2007) 15 NWLR (Pt. 1058)

498, the court condemned the police for arbitrary arrest and detention as well as awarded punitive damages against the police.

Prolonged and Unlawful Detention: Holding suspects beyond the legal limit without remand orders is rampant in Nigeria. Suspects arrested by the police languish for weeks, months, or even years in deplorable conditions in police cells and they are subjected to degrading conditions without trial.

Extortion and Bribery: Demanding money for bail (even for bailable offences), for filing complaints, for "fuel" to investigate, or to "settle" cases by the Nigerian police is a big dent on effective policing and access to justice in Nigeria. This places justice out of the reach of the poor and constitutes a veritable platform for perversion of justice.

Torture and Coercion: The use of torture to extract confessions remains a grave concern, rendering any "evidence" obtained through that process inadmissible (See the Administration of Criminal Justice Act) and violating the fundamental rights of suspects.

Shoddy Investigations: Lack of training, resources, and sometimes expertise, leads to poor evidence gathering, contamination of crime scenes, and weak case files. This results in cases being struck out or lost in court, denying victims access to justice

Politicization and Influence Peddling: Investigating or failing to investigate offences based on political instructions or the status of the suspect/victim is a common phenomenon in Nigerian policing system.

Harassment of Lawyers: Lawyers seeking access to their clients in detention or attempting to ensure due process are sometimes obstructed or harassed by police officers.

Impacts

- I. These practices do more than deny individual justice; they foster public distrust, encourage self-help, and create a pervasive sense of impunity for perpetrators, especially those with connections or resources. They block the path to justice at its very origin.
- II. Moreover, when access to justice is costly, unpredictable, bristled with corruption, marred by incompetence, subjected to sporadic cases of delay and distrust; this has serious implications for economic, social and political developments. One of the major hinderances to foreign direct investment in Nigeria is the delay in Nigerian legal system. Investors are attracted to countries where economic and contractual disputes can be settled with speed, accuracy and predictability. A country where industrial and commercial disputes and litigations take an average of sixteen years to settle cannot be an investment destination for foreign direct investment.
- III. The Nigerian political and democratic system is highly underdeveloped because of poor access to justice; lack of good internal democracy among political parties and political topsy-turvy; to mention just a few, which are orchestrated and aided by poor legal system. It is not uncommon for Nigerian courts to declare candidates who did not contest election as winners of election or to declare unpopular candidates as winners of elections that are marred by rigging and over voting. It has become a cliché for the political elites to sarcastically ask their political opponents to go to court if unsatisfied by

controversial political processes in a way that suggest that the Nigerian courts are in their pockets. The resultant effect of this is that, the worst persons in Nigeria are the ones ruling the best persons.

5. THE WAY AHEAD

Despite these daunting challenges, I stand before you with optimism. I am very sure that despite the palpable darkness pervading access to justice in Nigeria; there will be light at the end of the tunnel. I firmly believe that we are at a pivotal moment in the history of our country with opportunities for transformative change. We must seize these opportunities aggressively by doing the following:

I. DEPLOYING TECHNOLOGY AS A CATALYST FOR ACCESS TO JUSTICE:

This is our most potent weapon. The future is digital, and justice cannot be left behind.

- a) *E-Filing and Virtual Hearings*: The pandemic proved it is possible to conduct judicial proceedings virtually. We need a mandatory, secure, reliable, and user-friendly national e-filing platform integrated across all courts. Virtual hearings (using platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or tailored platforms should be encouraged. In recent times, I have conducted cases virtually at the National Industrial Court and High Court with admirable level of clarity and speed.
- b) *Case Management Systems*: Implementing integrated, nationwide digital case management systems can track cases, reduce administrative bottlenecks, prevent "missing files," and provide real-time data for performance monitoring. This enables real-time tracking of cases, automatic calculation of

timelines, electronic service of documents, digital evidence management and provides crucial data for judicial performance monitoring and resource allocation. The recent efforts by the FCT High Court and Lagos State Judiciary are commendable starting points but need scaling and standardization.

- c) *Online Legal Resources & AI tools*: Developing comprehensive online sources of laws, judgments, and simplified legal guides empowers citizens and legal practitioners. Emerging AI tools can help potential litigants understand their issue, find relevant resources, or even identify if they have a viable case, directing them appropriately (e.g., to ADR, legal aid, or a lawyer).

II. ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR):

Alternative Dispute Resolution is a means of solving legal disputes through non-litigious procedures. It can also be described as a method of resolving disputes outside of the traditional litigation system. It includes: mediation, arbitration and conciliation. Mandatory pre-trial mediation mechanism must be included in Nigerian courts civil procedure rules. This can divert a huge volume of cases from the congested courts, delivering faster, cheaper, and often more satisfying resolutions.

In other words, there is a need to enact rules requiring parties in most civil disputes (contracts, land, family, debt) to attempt mediation/conciliation before filing cases in court or at a very early stage. This is the core of an effective Multi-Door Courthouse (MDC) system. Lagos State has led in this procedure, but national adoption and strengthening of this mechanism is vital.

It is also necessary to train and accredit mediators to resolve disputes swiftly, thus reducing the burden on police and courts thereby enhancing access to justice.

III. STRENGTHENING LEGAL AID:

We need an uptick in legal aid funding from government, international donors, and potentially innovative models like legal aid levies. The Legal Aid Council requires massive capacity building. Simultaneously, we must foster a stronger, more organized pro bono culture within the Bar. Incremental change is insufficient; we need a paradigm shift. We therefore need: radical increase in funding for the Legal Aid Council.

University Legal Aid Clinics. It is also important to expand and empower University Legal Aid Clinics to handle real cases under supervision, providing vital services while training future lawyers in social justice. Secure sustainable funding for these clinics.

IV. PROCEDURAL REFORMS & SPECIALIZED COURTS:

It is important to establish permanent, independent bodies tasked with continuously reviewing and simplifying rules of procedure to eliminate unnecessary technicalities and delays with a focus on expediting justice. Continuous review and simplification of court rules of procedure.

It is also important to expand specialized courts and divisions. We need to create more dedicated courts with specialized judges and tailored procedures such as

Commercial Courts for Fast-track complex business disputes, Small Claims Courts to handle debt recovery and minor civil claims, swiftly and cheaply, potentially limiting legal representation. Sexual Offences Courts with trained judges, prosecutors, support services, and expedited procedures to address the specific trauma and challenges of these cases must be encouraged.

V. INVESTING IN THE JUDICIARY:

This is non-negotiable. We need more Judges to drastically increase the number of judges at all levels to handle the caseload. Continuous and rigorous judicial education on substantive law, case management, ethics, and technology, improved welfare and security which are essential for judicial independence and attracting and retaining the best minds must be implemented.

VI. COLLABORATION IS KEY:

No single body can fix this. The Judiciary, NBA, Ministry of Justice, Police, Legal Aid Council, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), academia, and the community must work together strategically to enhance access to justice. Joint task forces on specific reforms (e.g., decongesting prisons, implementing tech solutions) are crucial.

We must establish permanent, high-level task forces involving the judiciary, NBA, Ministry of Justice, Police Force (represented by reform-minded leadership), Legal Aid Council, CSOs, Academia (like this great Faculty), and development partners to monitor access to justice.

6. THE FUTURE OF LEGAL PRACTICE

Ladies and Gentlemen, the future of legal practice in Nigeria is inextricably linked to improving access to justice. It demands that we evolve:

I. Proficiency in legal tech tools (e-discovery, AI research, case management software, e-filing platforms) will be mandatory, not optional. We must embrace continuous learning in this domain. Mastery of e-discovery tools, case management software, e-filing platforms, and virtual collaboration tools are essential for efficiency and competitiveness. Continuous learning is mandatory.

II. Beyond Litigation: Lawyers must increasingly position themselves as dispute resolution experts as skilled mediators, negotiators, and arbitrators guiding clients towards efficient solutions, not just protracted battles through litigations.

III. The complexity of modern law demands deeper specialization. Lawyers will need to develop expertise in emerging areas like cybersecurity law, data privacy, fintech regulation, and climate justice, while also strengthening core areas like ADR.

IV. Upholding the highest ethical standards is more critical than ever to enhance access to justice and to ensure standard in the legal profession. Zero tolerance for corruption, fierce protection of client confidentiality, and unwavering commitment to the rule of law are the bedrock upon which public trust is rebuilt. The Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Committee and the NJC must be seen to act swiftly and decisively to punish corrupt lawyers and judges.

7. CONCLUSION

Distinguished gentlemen and ladies, the mountain of challenges facing access to justice in Nigeria is high, but it is not unscalable. The path is littered with obstacles such as cost, delay, corruption, police brutality, ignorance, and inadequate infrastructure; to mention just a few. The tools, ideas, and opportunities to enhance the Nigerian justice system are avalanche. What has been lacking, too often, is the collective will, sustained commitment, and adequate resources.

I reiterate my cautious optimism. The monster facing the justice system is not unscalable. The opportunities are tangible: technology offers unprecedented tools, ADR provides efficient alternatives, a revitalized legal aid and pro bono ecosystem can bridge the cost gap, procedural reforms can unclog the courts, and a well-resourced, ethical judiciary is the cornerstone.

In Nigeria, we pay lip service to justice while underfunding its institutions. We lament corruption but hesitate to root it out decisively. The future of legal practice in Nigeria hinges entirely on our profession's ability to lead the change in making justice accessible and predictable. It demands relentless innovation, unwavering ethical fortitude, unprecedented collaboration, and a fundamental reorientation towards service; not just to paying clients, but to the sacred ideal of justice itself, especially for the voiceless and vulnerable.

Let us leave here today not just with renewed understanding, but with a concrete resolve. Let us build a justice system that is not just for the privileged few, but for every Nigerian. A justice system that is efficient, fair, affordable, and worthy of our great nation.

Thank you.