



NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

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PRESS RELEASE

NBA CONDEMNS RECENT ATTACKS ON COURTS IN IMO STATE, LAWYERS IN NIGERIA

The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) has confirmed the report that some yet-to-be identified arsonists burnt down the High Court of Imo State building in Orlu, Imo State, on Friday, 16th December 2022. In the process, all the Court's files, exhibits, and records books were completely razed. The NBA strongly condemns this crime on the court. We cannot build a virile justice system that upholds the rule of law if we continue to destroy the structures upon which justice stands.

The NBA is concerned that this suspected arson on the court was premeditated, as eyewitnesses (including a court official who lives close to the court in Orlu) confirmed that the perpetrators started by shooting sporadically to scare away everyone before wreaking havoc on the Court.

The NBA is particularly disturbed that barely 48 hours after the incident at the High Court of Imo State, Orlu, there was another fire incident at the Bailiffs' Section of the Magistrates Court in Owerri, Imo State and all the files and exhibits in that part of the Magistrates Court were totally destroyed. While investigations are ongoing to determine the actual cause of the fire incident in the Owerri Magistrate Court, the NBA notes with deep concern that attacks on judicial institutions are gradually becoming a disturbing trend in Imo State. Not too long ago, the Customary Court in Orlu was razed by suspected hoodlums, and the National Industrial Court in Owerri has remained shut following an attack and abduction of three court staff in the course of their lawful duties.

There is no gainsaying the fact that these attacks on the Courts will and have affected the confidence of the residents in the Government, particularly its judicial arm; for if the Courts which are 'Houses of Justice' are not safe, no citizen will consider his or her life and properties to be safe. Equally, these attacks will cause unimaginable and inordinate delay in the administration of justice and impact negatively on the livelihoods of our members in Imo State, many of whom are litigators.

While the NBA leadership is in touch with our local Branches in Imo State in order to ensure that the culprits are found and made to face the full weight of the law, the NBA also calls on the Government of Imo State to deliberately and urgently beef up security in and around all the Courts premises in the State. Besides the fact that judicial officers must be protected to perform their constitutional duties in a safe atmosphere, the

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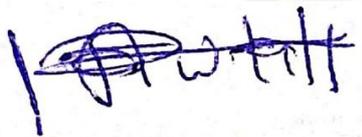
Courts in which they sit also house sensitive documents and people's properties, as such, the Courts deserve the maximum security. Citizens are also urged to be vigilant and observant to ensure that no one, for selfish interests, makes a mess of what is important to us all.

In similar vein, the NBA acknowledges the present security challenges in the country, but the NBA leadership is equally disconcerted about the recent upsurge of attacks on the lives and persons of legal practitioners. While reports suggest that our members in Imo and Rivers states are the worst hit, lawyers in other states of the Federation including the FCT have lost their lives in these attacks, most of which are suspected to be targeted and connected to the professional representations of clients by Counsel.

The NBA shall firmly resist the attempt to return the legal profession to the dark days where lawyers conducted their professional affairs in fear. Citizens need to be aware that lawyers are not their enemies or opponents. Lawyers only aid the administration of justice, and the law courts still remain the lawful and civil forum of resolving disputes.

It is this state of affairs that has made the NBA leadership seek an audience with the Inspector General of Police at a meeting where these targeted attacks on lawyers, judges, and courts will top the agenda. The NBA hopes that a frank conversation and honest collaboration with the Nigerian Police will stem this terrible tide.

In the meantime, the NBA urges our members to remain security conscious and continue to carry on their professional activities with diligence and adherence to the Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners.



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National Publicity Secretary