

## **THE NBA-ICLE INTERNATIONAL ARBITRATION MENTORSHIP: THE STORY SO FAR**

As part of its efforts to bolster the dispute resolution expertise of Nigerian legal practitioners, the Nigerian Bar Association Institute of Continuing Legal Education (NBA-ICLE) under its erstwhile Chairman – Tobenna Erojikwe, partnered with leading global law firm Mishcon de Reya to initiate an international arbitration mentorship for Nigerian lawyers. An initiative of this nature has become a career imperative for Nigerian lawyers, especially in light of the growing importance of arbitration in resolving international commercial disputes, reflecting the NBA's commitment to elevating the standards of legal practice in Nigeria.

The inaugural cohort of six mentees was selected after a competitive process that attracted over 300 applications, with all six mentees representing Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, bringing diverse perspectives and experiences to the program. The mentees are Prof. Abdul Hamid Oba Yusuf (North Central – NBA Ilorin Branch), Dr. Joy Akighbe South-South – NBA Benin Branch), Samuel Atilade (South West – NBA Lagos Branch), Abubakar Sadiq Usman (North East – NBA Damaturu Branch), Tukur Badamasi Dabai (North West – NBA Kaduna Branch) and Chinedu Okoro (South East – NBA Onitsha Branch), while yours truly of the NBA Enugu branch was selected as the Scheme Coordinator.

The Mentor for the Scheme is Mishcon de Reya's Greg Falkof, renowned global international arbitration expert who brings extensive expertise in international arbitration and has been instrumental in guiding the mentees through their professional journeys, offering them top-shelf insight to global best practices. The partnership with Mishcon de Reya represents a strategic move by the NBA-ICLE to upskill its members with invaluable resources and plug them to global networking opportunities. This initiative aligns with the NBA-ICLE's mission to promote continuing legal education and professional development, ultimately aiming to elevate the standards of legal service delivery in Nigeria.

The mentorship program crossed a major milestone with its introductory meeting which provided a platform for mentees to familiarize themselves with their mentor, setting the stage for meaningful interactions that will shape their learning experiences in the course of the Scheme. The session focused on sharing personal experiences at the Bar and highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities within the Nigerian arbitration landscape, while the mentor offered insights into the nuances of arbitration across various jurisdictions, shared initiatives and professional memberships that will lever the mentees' effort to advance their careers in international arbitration.

The mentor later on collated and shared International Arbitration materials comprising of arbitration courses, resource materials (links to blogs, webinars, podcasts, reports etc) and links for virtual participation in various events at the London International Disputes Week 2024 (LIDP 2024) which spanned from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> June 2024. Amongst the many exciting and informative events at the LIDP was the one themed “Corruption and arbitration/award challenges: what lessons can we learn from P&ID vs Nigeria” where speakers shared their reflections on key and recent developments regarding enforcement and challenge of awards while examining the finality of awards in the light of grounds for challenging or refusing award recognition as contained in the New York Convention and the role arbitral seats play in this regard.

The sessions at the LIDP 2024 availed mentees of profound industry exposure in arbitration and provided opportunities that could bolster their career in becoming thought leaders and policy experts in the field of arbitration. Following that, the mentees have sent questions and comments in advance of the coming meeting expected to be held before the yuletide.

As the mentorship program further unfolds, I look forward to the transformative experiences that lie ahead, and the value-add it will offer the various mentees being empowered to share fresh insights across their various geopolitical zones, and thereby accelerate the ICLE’s efforts to build a progressive NBA.

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