



# NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT: Plot 1102, Muhammed Buhari Way, Cadastral Zone A00, Central Business District, Abuja Nigerian Tel: +234 800 333 1111  
[www.nigerianbar.org.ng](http://www.nigerianbar.org.ng)

## STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION, MR. OLUMIDE AKPATA, ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE #ENDSARS PROTEST

My dear Colleagues, and Fellow Nigerians,

Today marks the anniversary of what historians would come to define as an epochal moment in the relations between the Nigerian state and her citizens. Many of us would recall that what started as a minor protest in Ughelli, Delta State, over the extra judicial killing of a citizen, by a trigger-happy policeman, soon snowballed into a conflagration that brought the entire nation on its knees for upwards of three weeks.

In what became known as #ENDARS protest, Nigerian youths took to the streets in their numbers to call out the excesses of the defunct police unit-SARS, in particular, and the Nigerian Police, at large. The protests would soon assume metaphorical dimensions as many of the protesting youths, used the opportunity to ventilate their grievances against the spate of bad governance in the country.

Although hailed as a success in its early weeks, the infiltration of the ranks of the protesters by hoodlums across the epicenters of the protests, turned what had been a peaceful and civil action into an orgy of violence. The degenerating violence would culminate in the ugly scenes witnessed at the Lekki Toll Plaza on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020 where operatives of the Nigerian Army reportedly fired gunshots into a crowd of protesting youths, resulting in the death of some citizens, and life-threatening injuries to many more.

Throughout the duration of the protests, the Nigerian Bar Association (“NBA”) and her members and volunteers across the country remained at the forefront of the confrontation in ensuring that unlawfully arrested protesters were unconditionally released by the security agencies; and those charged to Court, were provided *pro bono* legal services throughout the duration of their prosecution. The NBA undertook this responsibility in furtherance of its motto of promoting the rule of law and acting as a bulwark against the civil liberties of the Nigerian masses.

As a gesture of response to the agitations of the protesting youths, the government - both at the State and Federal levels – set up investigative panels of enquiry, to look into the historic and systemic incidents of abuse by operatives of the Nigerian Police against the citizens; and to recommend compensation where appropriate and also to make recommendations on the way forward in boosting police-citizens relations.

While most of the investigative panels, have concluded their assignment in states such as Rivers, Enugu, Edo, Nasarawa, Plateau amongst others, it is depressing to note that, in most of these states, the payment of compensation to victims whose petitions were established, has simply not happened. Save for Lagos State where the panel has been most successful, in terms of the number of petitions treated, and the compensations doled out, the situation in other

### NATIONAL OFFICERS:

Olumide A. Akpata **President**

Joyce Oduah, **General Secretary**; John Aikpokpo Martins, **1st Vice President**; Debo Adeyemo Kazeem, **2nd Vice President**; Mercy Ijato Agada, **Treasurer**; Olakunle Edun, **Welfare Secretary**; Raphael Nnamdi Anagor, **Financial Secretary**; Dr. Rapuluchukwu Nduka, **Publicity Secretary**; Uchenna Nwadialo, **Assistant Secretary**; Ferdinand Naza, **Assistant Publicity Secretary**

states has been anything but encouraging. This situation is indicative of the government's less than noble attitude to the plight of citizens; part of which it may be recalled, exacerbated the protests last year.

On the occasion of the anniversary of such a symbolic moment in our nation's history, I want to, on behalf of the NBA urge the Federal and State governments to deploy this rare opportunity to address all pending compensations arising from the determination of the panels of inquiry and to immediately commence the process of implementation of the recommendations of the panels in their respective reports. This, it goes without saying, is the only way of vindicating government's sensitivity and commitment to addressing the associated factors that necessitated the protests.

I am, however, not under any illusion that the issues associated with police-citizen relations can be addressed by mere recommendations of quasi-judicial panels. A sustainable improvement in the quality of that relationship must consist of robust legislative intervention that addresses the structural problems of the Police Force itself as an institution, with particular concern to the welfare and discipline of the Rank and File.

It was in furtherance of this realization, that the Nigerian Bar Association, is collaborating with the House of Representatives in its legislative response to the underlying issues. That intervention crystallised into a Bill repealing and re-enacting the Police Service Commission Act, which is due, now for Third Reading at the National Assembly. I am confident that the propositions in the draft Bill, when passed into Law, would achieve a significant landmark in the relationship between the citizens and the police.

It is regrettable that on the occasion of the anniversary of such a symbolic moment in our nation's history, we do not appear to have learnt our lessons as symbolized by the arrest and detention of peaceful protesters exercising their fundamental human rights, and journalists going about their lawful duties at the Lekki Toll Plaza this morning. The NBA unequivocally calls for unconditional release of all peaceful protesters and journalists arrested today and hereby mandates the NBA Human Rights Committee to immediately spring into action to ensure the protection of their rights.

I want to conclude by honouring the memories of all those who have died due to police/SARS related brutality. In this regard, particular mention must be made of those who fell at the Lekki Toll Plaza on that fateful day. We are consoled by the fact that their ultimate sacrifice was not in vain. If anything, it has elicited a new national consciousness amongst the youths of Nigeria; one that would continue to be consolidated in the struggle for justice, equity, and fairness. They are the heroes of this hour. May their soul continue to rest in peace, and may their memory be a blessing to us.



**OLUMIDE AKPATA**

President

Nigerian Bar Association

20<sup>th</sup> October 2021