THE UMUAHIA DECLARATION

ON PUBLIC INTEREST, JUSTICE, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

ADOPTED AT THE 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION – SECTION ON PUBLIC INTEREST AND DEVELOPMENT LAW (NBA-SPIDEL)

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE, UMUAHIA, ABIA STATE
9TH–13TH NOVEMBER 2026

"IN PUBLIC INTEREST: ADVANCING JUSTICE, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT"

PREAMBLE

We, the participants at the 2026 Annual Conference of the Nigerian Bar Association Section on Public Interest and Development Law (NBA-SPIDEL), comprising members of the Bar and Bench, legal academics, public officers, justice-sector institutions, civil society organisations, development partners, human rights advocates and other stakeholders, gathered in Umuahia, Abia State, from 9th to 13th November 2026 under the theme "In Public Interest: Advancing Justice, Democracy and Development";

RECOGNISING that justice, democracy and development are interdependent and that the Rule of Law, constitutionalism, accountable governance and respect for human dignity are indispensable to a just and inclusive society;

ACKNOWLEDGING the constitutional and professional responsibility of lawyers to defend the public interest, protect fundamental rights, hold public power accountable and promote access to justice, particularly for persons and communities facing disadvantage;

CONCERNED by persistent barriers to justice, institutional weaknesses, corruption, impunity, arbitrary detention, torture, inadequate legal aid, correctional centres congestion, deaths in custody, electoral distrust, digital exclusion and the unequal impact of social and economic challenges on vulnerable persons;

AFFIRMING that enhanced utilization of non-custodial sanctions, technological innovation, including artificial intelligence, must be developed and deployed in a manner that advances human welfare, protects privacy and personal data, respects due process and remains subject to appropriate legal and ethical safeguards;

INSPIRED by the deliberations and recommendations of the Conference, including the discussions on democratic governance, access to justice, legal aid, digital justice, torture prevention and rehabilitation of victims, correctional reforms and use of alternatives to imprisonment, paralegal services, disability inclusion, legal education and professional responsibility;

HEREBY DECLARE AND COMMIT AS FOLLOWS:

I. OUR DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

1. That the Rule of Law shall remain the foundation of democratic governance, and no person, institution or public authority is above the Constitution or the law.

2. That public office is a public trust and must be exercised transparently, accountably and in the service of the people.

3. That the independence, impartiality and institutional autonomy of the Judiciary are essential safeguards of democracy and must be protected against undue interference.

4. That access to justice is a fundamental public interest imperative and must not be determined by a person's income, status, gender, disability, location or other circumstances of disadvantage.

5. That the prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment is absolute, and every allegation of torture requires effective investigation, accountability and appropriate redress.

6. That children, women, persons with disabilities, indigent persons, detainees and underserved communities are entitled to meaningful protection, participation and access to justice.

7. That technology should strengthen, not diminish, human rights, legal accountability, professional integrity and the quality of justice delivery.

8. That lawyers have a continuing duty to speak truth to power, resist corruption and impunity, uphold professional ethics and deploy their skills in defence of the public interest.

9. That whole of societies approach involving coordination, collaboration and cooperation between government agencies, voluntary sector and the private sector, enhancing strong synergy and working relationships between lawyers and health professions including psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers etc in providing support sevices and redress for victims of violations of human rights.

II. OUR COMMITMENTS AND CALLS TO ACTION

1. RULE OF LAW AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE: We call on all arms and tiers of government to respect constitutional limits, comply with court orders, strengthen public accountability and protect democratic institutions from unlawful interference.

2. INDEPENDENT AND EFFECTIVE JUSTICE INSTITUTIONS: We call for measures that secure the financial, administrative and institutional independence of the Judiciary, improve justice-sector coordination and address delays that deny citizens timely and effective remedies.

3. ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND LEGAL AID: We commit to supporting the National Legal Aid Strategy 2026–2036 through structured collaboration among the NBA, NBA-SPIDEL, the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria, government institutions, civil society and development partners. We call for adequate funding, measurable indicators, effective monitoring and annual public assessment of implementation.

4. PRO BONO SERVICE: We call on lawyers and NBA branches to expand organised pro bono services, establish referral and supervision arrangements and prioritise indigent persons and vulnerable communities. We encourage recognition of pro bono service as a practical expression of the profession's public duty.

5. DIGITAL JUSTICE AND RESPONSIBLE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: We call for a sustainable and inclusive digital justice framework that supports e-filing, electronic case management, digital legal information and efficient case tracking. We further call for legal and

ethical safeguards relating to data protection, privacy, cybersecurity, confidentiality, accuracy, due process and the protection of children.

6. LEGAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: We call on the NBA, Council of Legal Education, Nigerian universities and relevant institutions to modernise legal education through practical training, clinical legal education, technology competence, AI literacy, digital evidence, professional ethics and continuing professional development.

7. ELECTORAL JUSTICE: We call for credible, transparent and accountable electoral administration; effective implementation of electoral laws; inclusive voter registration and civic education; and electoral institutions insulated from political manipulation.

8. TORTURE PREVENTION AND SURVIVOR-CENTRED REDRESS: We call for effective implementation of the Anti-Torture Act, 2017; independent investigation of allegations; accessible complaint mechanisms; appropriate recording of interrogations; regular monitoring of detention facilities; and medical, psychological, social and legal rehabilitation, reparation and reintegration for survivors. We commit to operationalising the Charter of Rights of Victims and Survivors of Torture – the words, experiences and voices of survivors across our States in Nigeria matter to us.

9. CORRECTIONAL AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: We call on federal and state authorities to implement lawful non-custodial measures, strengthen correctional oversight, reduce overcrowding and prioritise rehabilitation and reintegration. We encourage states to develop and implement correctional and restorative justice frameworks consistent with applicable law. The State Correctional Services Law should be enacted and a working framework with necessary budgetary funding and support from necessary stakeholders put in place by all States.

10. PARALEGAL TRAINING AND SERVICES: We support the institutionalisation of paralegal training and certifications in tertiary institutions through harmonised curricula, appropriate accreditation, a national registry, a code of conduct, continuing professional development and clear supervision and referral arrangements. Paralegal services must complement, and not unlawfully substitute for, the work of qualified legal practitioners and other gaps in the justice and other relevant community based initiatives. We adopt the work of the network of paralegal training institutions and partnerships have been built between the network, tertiary institutions, National Universities Commission, Legal Aid Council and civil society organizations.

11. DISABILITY INCLUSION: We call for accessible courts, legal services and justice institutions, reasonable accommodation and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in legal and policy processes. We commit to working with organisations of lawyers with disabilities to advance inclusive justice.

12. CHILD PROTECTION AND HUMAN DIGNITY: We call for stronger child-sensitive justice systems, effective Family Courts, protection against exploitation and trafficking, and safeguards against the detention of children with adults. We further call for coordinated responses to practices that expose children and other vulnerable persons to abuse or exploitation.

13. ANTI-CORRUPTION AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY: We call on lawyers to reject improper inducements, maintain professional integrity, undertake appropriate client due

diligence and ensure that legal services are not knowingly used to facilitate money laundering, terrorism financing or other unlawful conduct, while respecting constitutional rights and legal professional privilege.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL AND REGIONAL JUSTICE: We call for responsive legal and policy action on environmental degradation, flooding, insecurity, human trafficking, child hawking, educational exclusion and other region-specific challenges. Development planning must include the meaningful participation of local communities, women, young people, persons with disabilities and civil society.

III. COMMITMENT TO IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

We recognise that declarations and resolutions have value only to the extent that they produce practical and measurable change. Accordingly, we call on NBA-SPIDEL to:

1. Develop an implementation framework identifying priority actions, responsible institutions, partnerships and indicative timelines arising from this Declaration and the Conference resolutions.

2. Engage the NBA leadership, relevant Ministries of Justice, the Judiciary, the Legal Aid Council, law enforcement and correctional institutions, legal education bodies, civil society and development partners in advancing the commitments herein.

3. We hereby adopt the the Charter of Rights of Victims and Survivors of Torture and commit to the full operationalization and implementation in Nigeria,

4. We commit to develop a mechanism to promote mentoring and other support to women in the justice sector and young women lawyers.

5. Promote periodic public reporting on progress, challenges and implementation gaps, and use subsequent NBA-SPIDEL conferences as platforms for review and accountability.

6. Support research, public education, strategic litigation, capacity building and community-based initiatives that translate the principles of this Declaration into accessible justice and improved public welfare.

IV. OUR COLLECTIVE PLEDGE

We, the participants, pledge to uphold the values expressed in this Declaration and to use our respective offices, professional capacities and institutions to advance justice, democracy and development in the public interest.

We affirm that the legal profession must remain a courageous and principled guardian of constitutionalism, human rights and accountable governance. We further affirm that the public interest is not an abstract ideal: it is reflected in the safety of the individual, the dignity of the vulnerable, the integrity of public institutions and the equal protection of the law.

From Umuahia, Abia State, we call on all stakeholders to move from words to action and to build a justice system that is accessible, independent, inclusive, responsive and worthy of public confidence.

DATED THIS 13TH DAY OF NOVEMBER 2026
AT UMUAHIA, ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

E-SIGNED

ASSOC. PROF. UJU AGOMOH, PhD
Chairperson
NBA-SPIDEL

ENOMEY J. AMATEY
Secretary
NBA-SPIDEL