COMMUNIQUÉ

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

HELD AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE (ICC), UMUAHIA, ABIA STATE, FROM 9TH TO 13TH NOVEMBER 2026

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

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1. The Nigerian Bar Association Section on Public Interest and Development Law (NBA-SPIDEL) held its 2026 Annual Conference at the International Conference Centre, Umuahia, Abia State, from 9th to 13th November 2026, under the theme: "In Public Interest: Advancing Justice, Democracy and Development."

1.2. The Conference brought together members of the Bar and Bench, government officials, legal academics, civil society organisations, development partners, justice-sector institutions, human rights advocates and other stakeholders to examine the role of law and the legal profession in advancing justice, democratic governance, accountability and sustainable development in Nigeria.

1.3. The Conference featured an opening ceremony and keynote address, plenary and technical sessions, regional discussions, specialised and breakout sessions, and practical engagements on access to justice, public interest litigation, institutional reform, technology and justice delivery, correctional services, torture prevention, disability inclusion, paralegal services and the professional responsibilities of lawyers.

1.4. The opening ceremony included addresses and goodwill messages by distinguished national and state leaders and representatives of the legal profession. The keynote address was delivered by His Excellency, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, SAN, GCON, former Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Conference acknowledged the support and hospitality of the Government and people of Abia State and the contributions of the Nigerian Bar Association, conference partners, sponsors, speakers, facilitators and participants.

1.5. Having considered the keynote address, opening remarks, presentations, discussions and recommendations recorded across the Conference sessions, the Conference makes the following observations and resolutions.

2.0 A. OBSERVATIONS

1. Justice, democracy and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing and cannot be achieved without respect for the Rule of Law, constitutionalism, institutional independence and public accountability.

2. The principal obstacles to effective justice delivery are not always the absence of laws, but persistent implementation failures, weak institutions, inadequate funding, corruption, impunity, poor coordination and insufficient accountability.

3. Judicial independence requires genuine financial, administrative and institutional autonomy. Public institutions must be protected from undue interference, and public office must be exercised as a trust and responsibility rather than a personal privilege.

4. Public interest advocacy must be people-centred and responsive to the everyday justice needs of ordinary Nigerians, particularly indigent persons, women and girls, children, persons with disabilities, persons in detention and underserved communities.

5. Access to justice remains constrained by the cost of legal services, limited public awareness, geographical barriers, inadequate legal aid capacity and insufficient participation of private legal practitioners in pro bono services.

6. Technology, including artificial intelligence and digital justice tools, presents significant opportunities to improve legal research, case management, e-filing, legal information and access to legal services. These opportunities must be accompanied by safeguards for data protection, privacy, due process, accuracy, accountability and the rights of children and other vulnerable users.

7. The legal profession and legal education institutions must respond to technological change through curriculum reform, practical training, continuing professional development and the cultivation of critical thinking, professional ethics and responsible use of AI.

8. Electoral credibility and democratic legitimacy depend on transparent electoral administration, effective implementation of electoral laws, credible technology, voter education, institutional independence and judicial interpretation that promotes certainty and public confidence.

9. Human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, torture, coercive interrogation and denial of medical attention to persons in custody, persist despite existing constitutional and statutory safeguards. The prohibition of torture is absolute and requires effective enforcement, independent oversight and accountability.

10. Overreliance on custodial sentences, congestion in correctional facilities, weak rehabilitation structures and inadequate implementation of non-custodial measures undermine the administration of criminal justice. State-level correctional and restorative justice frameworks offer important opportunities for reform.

11. Paralegals can help bridge the justice gap by providing legal awareness, referrals, documentation and community-based support, provided that their training, accreditation, supervision, ethical boundaries and relationship with qualified legal practitioners are clearly established.

12. Persons with disabilities continue to encounter physical, institutional, communication and attitudinal barriers that restrict their participation in society and access to justice. Disability must be approached from a rights-based and inclusion perspective.

13. The implementation of the National Legal Aid Strategy 2026–2036 will require measurable indicators, clear institutional responsibilities, sustainable funding, effective monitoring and annual evaluation. A strategy without implementation and accountability mechanisms cannot produce lasting change.

14. Lawyers and legal institutions have professional and public responsibilities to prevent their services from being used to facilitate money laundering, terrorism financing or other illicit activities, while preserving legal professional privilege, fair hearing, the presumption of innocence and other fundamental rights.

3.0 B. RESOLUTIONS

After deliberations on the issues raised during the Conference, the Conference resolves as follows:

I. RULE OF LAW, DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

1. That all arms and tiers of government must uphold constitutional supremacy, the Rule of Law, separation of powers and the authority of courts, and must comply with court orders without exception.

2. That the independence of the Judiciary be strengthened through effective financial, administrative and institutional autonomy, and that judicial officers discharge their duties without fear, favour or undue influence.
3. That the NBA and NBA-SPIDEL intensify public interest advocacy, strategic litigation, civic engagement and policy dialogue to challenge abuses of power, corruption, impunity and unlawful government action.
4. That public institutions adopt transparent, accountable and participatory governance practices, and that citizens and civil society be encouraged to engage lawfully and actively in holding public officers accountable.

II. ACCESS TO JUSTICE, LEGAL AID AND PRO BONO SERVICES

1. That the NBA, NBA-SPIDEL and the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria strengthen structured collaboration to expand legal aid and pro bono representation across all NBA branches, with particular attention to indigent persons and underserved regions.
2. That lawyers be encouraged to undertake pro bono matters as part of their professional and civic responsibility, including through organised referral, supervision, reporting and recognition mechanisms.
3. That legal aid be made available at the earliest stages of arrest, investigation, detention and criminal proceedings, and that public awareness of available legal aid services be expanded.
4. That the National Legal Aid Strategy 2026–2036 be implemented through clear institutional responsibilities, measurable performance indicators, adequate funding, regular monitoring and annual evaluation at successive NBA-SPIDEL conferences.
5. That the Legal Aid Clearing House be strengthened or reactivated as an effective coordination and referral mechanism among legal aid providers, lawyers, civil society organisations and relevant institutions.

III. TECHNOLOGY, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND JUSTICE DELIVERY

1. That law faculties, the Nigerian Law School, the NBA and law firms collaborate to integrate technology competence, AI literacy, digital evidence, data protection, cybersecurity and professional responsibility into legal education and training.
2. That lawyers be equipped to critically assess, verify and responsibly use AI-generated legal research and advice, and must not rely on unverified outputs in professional work or court processes.

3. That justice-sector institutions accelerate the responsible adoption of e-filing, electronic case management, digital records and case-tracking systems, supported by adequate infrastructure, training, funding and accountability safeguards.
4. That any national or sectoral digital justice framework protect privacy, personal data, confidentiality, due process, accessibility and the rights of vulnerable users, including children and persons with disabilities.
5. That government and relevant stakeholders develop sustainable funding and maintenance arrangements for justice technology, including appropriate public-private partnerships, without compromising public accountability or access.

IV. ELECTORAL JUSTICE AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

1. That electoral laws and their implementation be strengthened to promote transparency, certainty, accountability and credible elections, including appropriate legal and institutional support for technology that enhances electoral integrity.
2. That electoral institutions be insulated from political manipulation and excessive discretionary powers be addressed through clear procedures, transparency and effective oversight.
3. That INEC and relevant stakeholders intensify continuous voter registration, voter education and civic sensitisation to promote inclusive democratic participation and reduce voter apathy.
4. That the NBA and NBA-SPIDEL sustain engagement on electoral reform and advocate judicial and legislative approaches that strengthen public confidence in electoral justice.

V. HUMAN RIGHTS, TORTURE PREVENTION AND DETENTION OVERSIGHT

1. That the Anti-Torture Act, 2017 and other applicable safeguards be effectively implemented, and that all allegations of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment be promptly, independently and impartially investigated.
2. That the relevant Ministries of Justice be encouraged to establish dedicated complaint desks for victims of torture, with accessible reporting, referral, investigation and prosecution pathways.
3. That advocacy be intensified for an independent Anti-Torture Commission with appropriate powers to investigate allegations, monitor detention facilities and promote accountability.

4. That audio-visual recording of interrogations and the taking of confessional statements be made mandatory, and that CCTV systems be installed in police stations, detention facilities and designated interrogation rooms, subject to appropriate safeguards.
5. That interrogation practices be reviewed to promote professional, non-coercive and interview-based methods, and courts carefully scrutinise the circumstances in which confessional statements are obtained.
6. That persons in custody be given prompt access to legal representation, family contact and necessary medical care, and that hospitals adopt standard operating procedures for identifying, documenting and reporting suspected torture.
7. That government provide accessible medical, psychological and social rehabilitation, reintegration, compensation and reparation for survivors of torture.
8. That the NBA-SPIDEL engage the Police, DSS, correctional authorities, prosecuting agencies and the Judiciary in sustained institutional dialogue on torture prevention, detention oversight and enforcement of the law.

VI. CORRECTIONAL REFORM AND NON-CUSTODIAL MEASURES

1. That State Governments be encouraged to enact and effectively implement correctional service laws and non-custodial sentencing frameworks, and to support restorative justice as a meaningful component of justice administration.
2. That correctional authorities maintain reliable records of persons in custody, ensure that detention facilities operate within lawful capacity and strengthen independent monitoring and oversight.
3. That non-custodial measures be implemented in accordance with applicable law, with emphasis on rehabilitation, reintegration, skills development and reduction of correctional facility congestion.
4. That children and young persons be protected from detention alongside adults, and that Family Courts and other child-sensitive justice mechanisms be strengthened and made operational.
5. That law faculties and professional training institutions incorporate correctional reform, restorative justice and non-custodial measures into relevant legal education programmes.

VII. INSTITUTIONALISATION OF PARALEGAL TRAINING AND SERVICES

1. That the Conference recognises the need for a formal and coordinated framework for paralegal training and services as a means of expanding access to justice, particularly in underserved and rural communities.

2. That the Network of Paralegal Training Institutions, in partnership with Legal Aid Council and PRAWA with the support of International IDEA are encouraged to collaborate with NBA-SPIDEL.

4. That a national registry of trained and certified paralegals be developed and maintained, with clear quality assurance and accountability mechanisms.

5. That paralegals operate within defined legal and ethical boundaries, under appropriate supervision and referral arrangements with qualified legal practitioners, and must not hold themselves out as legal practitioners or undertake functions reserved by law for legal practitioners.

6. That a Code of Conduct, continuing professional development framework and sustainable funding arrangements be developed to support credible paralegal services.

VIII. DISABILITY INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBLE JUSTICE

1. That the NBA and NBA-SPIDEL promote a rights-based approach to disability and advocate the removal of physical, communication, institutional and attitudinal barriers to justice and full participation in society.

2. That lawyers living with disabilities and relevant disability organisations be included in policy development, public interest advocacy, legislative reform, legal aid and pro bono initiatives.

3. That courts, justice institutions, conference venues and legal service providers take practical steps to improve accessibility and reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities.

4. That collaboration be strengthened between NBA-SPIDEL and organisations of lawyers with disabilities to advance disability rights, research, documentation, professional inclusion and accessible justice delivery.

IX. LEGAL EDUCATION, PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LAWYERS

1. That the NBA, Council of Legal Education and Nigerian universities collaborate to bridge the gap between theoretical legal education and practical legal training through

improved curricula, clinical legal education, courtroom exposure, mentorship and professional ethics.

2. That legal education respond to emerging areas of practice, including technology law, environmental law, corporate governance, digital rights and other fields relevant to contemporary legal practice.
3. That SPIDEL engage the Legal Practitioners' Privileges Committee on clear, fair and merit-based criteria that appropriately recognise the contribution of legal academics to legal scholarship and the development of the profession.
4. That lawyers uphold the highest standards of professional conduct, refuse improper inducements and use public interest litigation competently, responsibly and with integrity.

X. TERRORISM FINANCING, MONEY LAUNDERING AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

1. That lawyers strengthen client due diligence, know-your-client procedures, beneficial ownership checks, risk assessment, record keeping and continuing professional education in relation to money laundering and terrorism financing risks.
2. That lawyers must not knowingly permit their professional services, client accounts or transactions to be used to conceal or facilitate criminal conduct, and should seek appropriate guidance where a transaction raises reasonable concerns.
3. That implementation of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing obligations must respect the Constitution, fair hearing, the presumption of innocence, confidentiality and the proper scope of legal professional privilege.
4. That the NBA should provide practical guidance and training to legal practitioners on compliance obligations, risk-based approaches and the distinction between legitimate legal fees, client transactions and prohibited assistance.

XI. REGIONAL PUBLIC INTEREST PRIORITIES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. That the NBA and SPIDEL engage relevant government institutions and professional bodies to address human rights violations, police brutality, human trafficking, child hawking, exploitation of minors, unsafe practices relating to organ harvesting, environmental degradation and flooding.
2. That judicial and other appropriate monitoring of detention facilities be strengthened to prevent abuse and safeguard the rights and dignity of persons in custody.

3. That government intensify measures to address insecurity and its impact on education, particularly the incidence of out-of-school children, and ensure safe access to education for all children.
4. That regional and community development initiatives adopt inclusive planning and meaningful participation by women, youth, indigenous and local communities, persons with disabilities, civil society and the private sector.

4.0 C. CONFERENCE COMMITMENT

The Conference reaffirms its commitment to advancing justice, democracy and development in the public interest. It recognises that the law must serve as an instrument for protecting human dignity, checking abuses of power, expanding access to justice and promoting inclusive and sustainable development.

The Conference calls on the Nigerian Bar Association, NBA-SPIDEL, the Judiciary, government institutions, legal education institutions, civil society, development partners and all members of the legal profession to translate the deliberations and resolutions of the Conference into practical programmes, institutional reforms, sustained partnerships and measurable outcomes.

The Conference further commits NBA-SPIDEL to monitoring progress on the implementation of these resolutions and the Umuahia Declaration on Public Interest and to using subsequent conferences and other appropriate platforms to review achievements, identify gaps and promote accountability.

5.0 D. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Conference expresses its profound appreciation to the Government and people of Abia State for their hospitality and support; the leadership of the Nigerian Bar Association; the Chair and members of the 2026 Conference Planning Committee; the speakers, session chairs, panellists, facilitators, rapporteurs, development partners, sponsors, volunteers and delegates whose contributions made the Conference a success.

DATED THIS 13TH DAY OF NOVEMBER 2026.

E-SIGNED

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

ENOMEY J. AMATEY
Secretary
NBA-SPIDEL