

WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE CHIEF JUDGE OF KADUNA STATE, HON. JUSTICE R. H. CUDJOE, OFR AT THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY OF THE JUDICIAL RESEARCH CENTRE (JRC), HELD AT HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE, MAIN COMPLEX, BIDA ROAD, KADUNA ON 30TH JULY, 2009 AT 10:00 AM

It is my singular honour and privilege to welcome each and every one of you to the commissioning of our Judicial Research Centre (JRC). As some of you are aware, Kaduna State Judiciary is one of the 10 pilot judiciaries in the country to benefit from the European Commission Funded Project entitled 'Support to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Nigerian Judiciary'. The Project is being coordinated in Nigeria by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in conjunction with the National Judicial Institute (NJI). The main objective of the Project is to develop and pilot the implementation of a comprehensive framework that would strengthen judicial integrity and capacity in Nigeria at both the Federal and selected States level.

At a National Working Group Meeting organised by UNODC, a Work Plan for the implementation of the Project was drawn up and adopted jointly by UNODC, NJI and the Chief Judges of the pilot States. At the State level, the State Implementation Committee was inaugurated to champion the development of an Action Plan that will strengthen judicial integrity and capacity. The Action Plan for Strengthening the Integrity and Capacity of the Justice System in Kaduna State

was developed and endorsed by the State Integrity Meeting for the Judiciary held on 27th & 28th June, 2007 in Kaduna. After extensive stakeholder consultations, the Implementation Committee for the Action Plan has further reviewed and developed the Action Plan which we are currently implementing. The measures and activities included in the Action Plan include access to justice; improving timeliness and quality of justice delivery, enhancing accountability, independence and integrity, as well as increasing coordination in the criminal justice system.

A series of Workshops and Trainings have been held both within and outside the State. Some of these include Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Training for Judicial Officers and Traditional Rulers, Workshop on Judicial Ethics, Court Recording Equipment Training and Communications Training Workshop for Journalists and Court Media Liaison Officers.

The Kaduna State Judiciary Town Hall Meeting (the first of its kind in the history of the Kaduna State Judiciary) was also organised by the UNODC, and held on 12th March, 2009. The purpose of the Meeting was to engage the general public and other stakeholders in the Justice Sector in an interactive session that would provide information on the reform efforts in the Judiciary and receive a feedback. It also served as an interactive session between various agencies and departments in the Justice Sector and the general public with the aim of receiving a feedback on the feelings of the public about the services they receive from the Judiciary, Ministry

of Justice, Police, Prisons, Road Safety, Civil Defence, Lawyers and other Justice Sector stakeholders. About 500 participants were drawn from all walks of life. The meeting also shared with the participants the rationale and status of the on-going efforts at reforming the Nigerian Judiciary.

It is against this background that the Judicial Research Centre (JRC) which is about to be commissioned was set up. It is jointly funded by the European Commission (EC) and the Kaduna State Judiciary, and was designed and implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)*. The aim of the Centre is to improve access to information and international best practices. The Centre will aid Judges immensely in writing judgments, as they will be able to easily check references and cases cited by counsel. It will facilitate easy access to information and increase case flow management, thereby increasing speed and timeliness in justice delivery and easy access to justice. *

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has, through counterpart funding, provided a well equipped Judicial Research Centre. The Centre is equipped with twenty one (21) HP Desktop computers with 17 inch Flat Screen Monitors and a Network Printer. The Server Room is also fully equipped with a 40KVA Stabilizer, 20KVA Network Inverter, a Server, Router and Switch. The access to high speed internet is powered via a C-Band VSAT. The centre has been tested and certified and will be available to all judicial officers and others for

research and training. Major e-law platforms can be accessed through the Centre as well as the latest software necessary for capacity enhancement of today's legal personnel.

If funds are provided by the State Government, we will replace the multimedia projector and screen now in our Conference Room with a Smartboard Screen for training needs. This is an interactive wide screen version of the conventional projector screen.

The general aim of all these reforms in the Justice Sector is to ensure speedy dispensation of justice, as justice delayed is justice denied. It is our hope and desire that with all these reforms, the general public will soon see and acclaim the speedy and judicious dispensation of justice in Kaduna State. At this juncture, may I call upon all stakeholders in the Executive and Legislative Branches of Government, the Nigerian Bar Association, the Police and Prison Services, Non-Governmental Organisations and the Civil Society, as well as my learned colleagues on the Bench to step-up their relentless efforts in improving the services we deliver to our citizens and those who come to our country to invest and participate in our economy, and to punish effectively those who violate our laws, while protecting the poor and the weak.

* We sincerely thank the European Commission for supporting us in funding this Research Centre and the UNODC for its design and implementation. We thank you very much for all your good work and hope that you will continue to identify with us in achieving speedy dispensation of justice. *

While thanking His Excellency, Arc. Mohammed Namadi Sambo, FNIA, the Governor of Kaduna State for honouring our invitation, it is our prayer that what he is about to commission will spur him on to release more funds for the development of the State Judiciary. The European Commission and the UNODC can only assist us. We have to build the Judiciary ourselves and that is a task that can easily be done if adequate funds are released. We must not forget that the true administration of justice is the firmest pillar of a good government.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I thank you all for honouring our invitation and wish you journey mercies back to your respective destinations.

Thank you all and may God bless.

RAHILA HADEA CUDJOE, OFR
CHIEF JUDGE
KADUNA STATE
NIGERIA.