

THE DEBACLE OF NIGERIA'S JUDICIARY

By Ben Umole

The climax of any country's decadence is the collapse of its Judiciary. This is talking about the Judiciary in the sense of the bar or the bench. In this regard, the importance and integral role any country's judiciary play in its development cannot be overemphasized and over flogged. One just needs to be modest in postulating the sanctum of the judiciary in a country.

In every country, the Judiciary is regarded as the bastion and the last hope of the common man as the cliché goes. When a society begins to cascade it starts with seemingly little things, which anyone would describe as trivial. But before you could say Jack Robinson, what started as a mere virus, becomes a cankerworm and the consequences are always very dire and acrimonious. They say, every sore starts as a mere wound that was initially undermined or trivialized.

This is the lugubrious situation that Nigeria finds itself today in respect of its Judiciary. This was a country whose judiciary was regarded as one of the best in the world. Nigeria's judiciary was so awesome that the bench and its Justices were the cynosure of eyes nationally and internationally. You could feel the sagacity, wits and courage in delivering salient judgements. Judgements given by courts were regarded as impeccable, sacrosanct and incontrovertible. No one dared raised eye brows over court judgements, especially SUPREME COURT, judgements. Supreme Court Justices were highly revered, adulated, esteemed and dignified. High Court Judges and Justices of the supreme court comported themselves with much aplomb and with every sense of self control. But that verve that used to make Nigeria Judiciary to blossom has evaporated, dwindled and even collapsed. The current Nigeria Judiciary is now in comatose and a relic of its former self. That dreaded malaise and scourge called corruption has crept into the hitherto sacred chambers of both the bar and the bench. But our focus here is more on the bench than the bar.

In the yore, so captivating was the judiciary that three erstwhile Nigerian Justices have adorned the World Court at The Hague in the Netherlands. They were: Justice Onyema, Dr. Olawale Teslim Elias and Bola Ajibola. The first two are now of blessed memory.

Lest I forget, Akinola Aguda, a Nigerian was one time the Chief Justice of The Gambia. Such was the awe and esteem that Nigeria's judiciary was elevated. And the Supreme Court had highly witty, diligent, fearless, courageous, audacious, industrious and selfless judges who gave thought provoking, fecund, well researched profound, and unblemished judgements. One can still vividly remember names like Atanda Fatai Williams, onetime CJN. Other Justices like Udo Udoma, Andrew Otutu Obaseki, Ayo Irekife, Sowimimo, Mohammed Bello, Chukwufidu Oputa, Uwaifo, to mention but a few. These were Justices who wrote their names in marbles as



far as the Nigeria Judiciary is concerned. These Judges were contented with what they had. They made integrity their watch word. To them, money was infinitesimal and secondary.

Do we still have the same kind of selfless, profound, iron clad and fisted Judges? It is not likely. The modern judges have been entrapped and caught in the web of corruption. Today, Nigerian judges are MC in public ceremonies. Judgement is now for the highest bidder. The richer you are the easier you get sweeter judgement that will favour. Nigerian politicians have penetrated and pull down the iron curtain that once separated and barricaded the Judiciary and the public. The supreme court has become more odious and malodorous in giving questionable judgements. The cases of Hope Uzodimma Vs Ihedioha, and the very recent case of Lawn, current senate President Vs Machina are examples of filthy, questionable and dismal cases, coming from the Apex Court. The judgements from high courts and courts of appeal are getting worrisome, gaudy, tawdry and too superficial. The beauty and dignity of this third estate is gradually ebbing and dimming. Current Nigeria judges have sold their honour for a pot of porridge.

But this sordid situation can still be redeemed and rejuvenated if only we can take the bulls by the horn and get men who are courageous enough to bell the cat, when occasions call for it. Nigeria still has men of integrity even with our current state of putrescence.

Finally, after the 2023, Presidential and Governorship elections in Nigeria, petitions are awash with multiplicity and variegated cases of election petitions to election tribunals at the state levels and even to the supreme court. It is only fair to advice that our current judges must deliver judgements with the fear of God in their hearts. They should not forget that as they judge the activities of others, God in His divine and remarkable ways, judges them. God 's judgement will always emerge as the mightiest and the best. This is a clarion call to the judiciary and must call a spade a spade and live up to their billing this around. They cannot afford to fail us anymore. Enough of the fiasco and debacle of the Judiciary.