



# NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

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**ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION, MR YAKUBU CHONOKO MAIKYAU, OON, SAN, DELIVERED AT THE VALEDICTORY COURT SESSION HELD IN HONOUR OF THE LATE ARAKUNRIN OLUWAROTIMI ODUNAYO AKEREDOLU, CON, SAN (AKETI) ON 19 FEBRUARY 2024 AT THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE OYO STATE, IBADAN**

## PROTOCOLS

1. My Lord, the Honourable, the Chief Judge of Oyo State, Honourable Justice Iyabo Yerima, and My Lords, the Judges of Oyo State Judiciary herein sitting *en banc*, I stand here today in this special court session and before the distinguished audience, to pay my tribute to a past president of the Nigerian Bar Association, a revered member of the inner Bar, one of the country's finest legal minds and political leaders; **Arakunrin Oluwarotimi Odunayo Akeredolu, Commander of the Niger, Senior Advocate of Nigeria – Aketi, as he was fondly called.**
2. Valedictory Court sessions, irrespective of the circumstance, are sober and solemn moments that speak to the transience of the positions we are privileged to hold in life and the fleetingness of life itself. When it is about death, it comes with it an additional feeling of sadness for an irreparable loss.
3. The news of the death of the revered past President of the NBA, despite his long battle with illness, came as a rude shock to me. As the dogged fighter that he was, he never betrayed any sign that he was battling any ailment. For those who knew, we trusted God and prayed for his full recovery. But alas, we were greeted with the sad news of his demise – his transition to the great beyond. I had cause to say that though the ailment may be known as the cause of his death, if the ailment were to speak, it would have testified that it afflicted the wrong person. What it went through in the hands of Aketi must have left it in no doubt that it did not defeat Aketi; that Aketi transitioned because it was time for him to go after fulfilling purpose. This is why, while Aketi's death may be counted as a great loss (and indeed it is), to the family, friends, the legal profession, and the entire nation, we can focus on his legacies and challenge ourselves to live and sustain them as a way to honour, respect and immortalize him.
4. In a culture that thrives on vainglorious titles and self-glorification, Mr. Akeredolu exemplified utmost humility by his rejection of chieftaincy titles and 'His Excellency' appellations which he was eminently qualified for. In a society where it is a taboo to fail to address a person by his titles – whether deserving or not, Akeredolu defied the norm. Instead, he chose to simply identify himself as Arakunrin – a gentleman. Simply a gentleman, and no more.

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5. His simplicity notwithstanding, Arakunrin's life was by no means the life of a simpleton. It is utterly impossible to abridge his eventful life into a tribute of a few pages. He was privileged by God to have done in a single lifetime what it would take about 5 average people to accomplish. Like the proverbial Midas, everything he touched turned into gold. If an average person achieved only one of the multi-faceted things that Arakunrin accomplished, it would have been a lifetime achievement. But Arakunrin was not an ordinary human, he was what Yorubas would call 'Okunrin Meta' (a man who is more than three men). This is also a testament that Arakunrin fulfilled purpose.
6. In the field of Law – his primary vocation, he attained the peak of the profession when he became the 139<sup>th</sup> legal practitioner to be conferred with the prestigious rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria on 19 August 1998. Beyond the rank, pages of the Law Reports are replete with the plethora of decided cases which remain an evergreen testimonial of his impeccable reputation as a forensic advocate and a skilful litigator.
7. Beyond courtroom advocacy, Aketi was a dyed-in-the-wool Bar man. From the time he was called to the Bar in 1978, he served the NBA in several capacities and at different levels. He variously served as Secretary and Vice Chairman of Ibadan Branch, National Publicity Secretary, member of the National Executive Committee (now Council) from 1985 until his demise and went on to become the 24<sup>th</sup> President of the NBA from 2008 to 2010 – one of the most influential and courageous Presidents ever to lead the NBA. He fought for the Bar, he worked for the Bar, and he led the Bar creditably. What is even more notable about his emergence as President of the NBA was that he was elected unopposed – an unprecedented feat and yet to be beaten record in the annals of NBA elections in Nigeria.
8. The late learned Senior Advocate of Nigeria also served the nation in various capacities at different times; he was Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice from 1997 to 1999, Chairman, Legal Aid Council from 2005 to 2006, and later as two-term Governor from 2017 till his demise. One can only imagine what Akeredolu would have done or said on the brazen attempt at invading our legal space through the so-called Enhanced Trade and Investment Partnership (ETIP). But that God allowed Arakunrin Akeredolu to leave at this time is because He (God) has already raised others who will defend the Nigerian legal market and we shall do it.
9. Leadership is not about power; it is about clear vision and unwavering responsibility. Akeredolu demonstrated the fact that leadership is not about the privileged minority but about service to the underprivileged majority. In all the leadership positions he occupied, he was professional, ethical, bold, courageous, brave, and principled. He was one leader that would never compromise his position or standard. More than just holding offices, Mr Akeredolu was a defender of the masses, a crusader for the citizens,

an advocate for the helpless, and an activist for the hapless. As Attorney General of Ondo State under a military regime, he displayed uncommon courage and unusual steadfastness by ensuring that although he was serving under a military regime, the rights of citizens were not violated, abridged, or trampled upon by the government of the day.

10. He firmly believed in the ability of the legal profession to make a difference in our society. It was this belief that led him into mainstream politics resulting in his being elected twice as Governor of Ondo State. Aketi will be positively remembered for his forthrightness, his down-to-earth perspectives especially on matters of national importance, and for his several contributions to the growth and development of Ondo State and the entire region. Permit me to say with no fear of contradiction that, in the words of Sir Christopher Alexander Sapara Williams, Arakunrin Akeredolu lived for the direction of his people and for the advancement of the cause of his country.
11. At this event, let me report albeit posthumously, to our past President, the development we have recorded on an issue that I know was very close to his heart – the welfare of judicial officers. I am pleased to report that the NBA’s recommendations for the upward review of judicial salaries and allowances which were supported by the NJC under the leadership of the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Honourable Justice Olukayode Ariwoola, GCON, are being favourably considered for implementation. We want to specifically commend the Honourable Attorney-General of the Federation, Prince Lateef O. Fagbemi, SAN, for his leadership role in this regard. The appropriation of **₦341, 625, 739, 236.00** for the Judiciary is a development that has never happened in the history of Nigeria. We look forward to the urgent implementation of the proposed review. I also know that Aketi would have requested President Tinubu to swear-in the 11 Justices appointed to the bench of the Apex Court to help with the decongestion of their Lordships’ dockets. This is also a message from Chief Folake Solanke, SAN, the Matriarch of the legal profession worldwide to President Tinubu. The matriarch happens to share the same birthday with President Tinubu
12. Arakunrin was tenacious. His was a life of determination and doggedness. He was that proverbial snail that would never give up until it has climbed to the top of the Iroko tree – no matter how long it takes. If an example of this is required, Arakunrin’s struggle to serve his people as the Governor of Ondo State comes handy. We all remember the titanic battle he fought in 2012 as the gubernatorial candidate of Action Congress of Nigeria. Four years later, Aketi was back and this time he won a resounding victory in 2016, a feat he was to repeat four years later in 2020 when he was re-elected the Governor of Ondo State.
13. As Governor, Aketi showed to all that governance is about service and not about pomp and pageantry. When the issue of insecurity was becoming the order of the day, Akeredolu rose up to the challenge with the establishment of *Amotekun* – a regional

vigilante body charged with securing lives and properties of people. He was the first Governor to pick up this gauntlet. In my own view, this is a practical demonstration of the provision of section 14(2)(b) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which provides that “*the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.*”

14. For his contributions to the progress of Nigeria, he was recognized by the Federal Government and conferred with the national honour of Commander of the Order of the Niger (CON) in October 2022. There is no denying that the learned Senior Advocate left indelible footprints in the sands of time.
15. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, one recent incident that forcefully brought home the loss of Aketi, and the reaction that was sure to have come from him, was the tragic event of the explosion in the city of Ibadan on 16 January. In my letter to the President on 14/02/2024, this is what I said on the Bodija explosion: “

***“The unfortunate incident in Bodija Area, Ibadan, Oyo State, which left many dead and several properties destroyed with craters all over the area, from the explosion that rocked the city on 16 January 2024 is one that clearly speaks to a fundamental failure of Nigeria’s security architecture and operational capabilities. That the perpetrator(s) of this heinous crime is said to be a Malian national is heartrending by itself and all we hear is that the culprit is yet to be apprehended. The question is, how did we get to the place of allowing anyone, whether a citizen or not to store explosives in any part of Nigeria, let alone a residential area with the capacity of wrecking such havoc on our people? There are law-abiding citizens who have worked their entire lives and from their meagre income, gratuity, and pension, built their retirement homes, only to become homeless overnight, due to the actions or inactions of some government official, who will allow explosives to be stored in such a location. Those involved must be identified and prosecuted for their actions, while those who suffered losses due to no fault of theirs, deserve to be compensated. This must be the case for all those who have suffered from one form of criminal activity or the other across the country.”***

I have no doubt that Arakunrin Akeredolu would have forcefully lent his voice on the matter. I reiterate my call on the Federal Government to look into this issue; identify and punish the culprits and compensate innocent Nigerians, who have suffered from the acts or omissions of government officials who must have compromised their duties to allow this to happen.

16. I have noted above that a tribute of this nature is not enough to chronicle the life and time of Arakunrin Akeredolu. I learnt that prior to his death, he had commissioned his biography to be written. That is vintage Aketi – the man with a vision, who saw the need to document his gigantic achievements which he always attributed to the grace of God. Aketi is gone but his legacies live on. His life is a lesson for all of us! We must begin or continue to interrogate ourselves on the life we are living and what legacies we

are going to leave behind. It is noteworthy that Aketi's life was not associated with profligacy. He was not mundane, nor one given to vanity; he was a man of values and principles who championed causes and impacted lives. Little wonder these are what we celebrate and shall continue to celebrate about the life and times of Aketi. At the end, these are all that matter!

17. I identify with the good people of Ondo State on the irreparable loss of their son and leader. I sympathise with the Nigerian Bar Association on the tragic death of our former president and illustrious leader of the Bar. I commiserate with the Akeredolu Family on this irreplaceable loss of their son, husband, and father. I must specifically bring my condolences to the matriarch of the legal profession worldwide; our own very revered Chief Folake Solanke, SAN. Like most of you already know, our grandmother had a domestic accident which saw her undergo surgical procedures. She was in three different hospitals but finally left hospital in July 2023, and has been wonderfully recuperating; she is well and getting stronger by the day. However, our grandma is distraught by the loss of Arakunrin Akeredolu, who is her professional son. Grandma always recounted how Aketi walked into her office as a young lawyer, to acknowledge grandma's feat of becoming the first female Senior Advocate of Nigeria and remained her mentee and son until his demise. I spent some time with grandma yesterday, she is dealing with the pains of this loss and is not able to participate in this event; culturally grandma would not be at this special court session in honour of her son. Our Matriarch extends her condolences to the family, the Bar, the people of Oyo and Ondo States and the country at large. Not surprising, the duo; mother and son, were recognised for their contributions to the legal profession, by naming the two wings of the old NBA Secretariat building in Garki, Abuja after them, which houses the Human Rights Institute (HRI) and the Institute of Continuing Legal Education (ICLE) of the NBA.
18. Let me also use this opportunity to publicly acknowledge and thank the Chairman of Ibadan Branch, Mrs Folashade Aladeniyi. Our grandma has told me so much about how she has been taking good care of her. It is my prayer that as you have honoured the aged, God will bless you and satisfy you with long life.
19. As believers, we are comforted by the absolute guide and promise by our Lord Jesus Christ, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 18 -14: ***“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. ... For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”***

20. Without a doubt, Arakunrin Akeredolu slept with Christ in his heart, as his Lord and Saviour.
21. On behalf of the National Executive Committee and members of the Nigerian Bar Association, I commiserate with the entire Akeredolu clan, particularly his wife, Betty, and children, on this very painful loss. I extend my condolences to His Excellency, the Governor of Ondo State, and the entire people of Ondo State. I similarly condole with the Governor of Oyo State and the people of the state over the loss of our leader. Aketi's departure is our collective loss. My prayer is that God Almighty will comfort the hearts of all members of his family, his colleagues, and friends. May the peace of God which is beyond human understanding, protect our hearts and minds through Christ our Lord, Amen.
22. As noted by My Lord, the Honourable Justice Helen Moronkeji Ogunwumiju, JSC, CFR, we shall all miss the patriotic, boisterous, comical, loyal, unassuming, always unapologetic, brutally honest, courageous, vocal Aketi. But we believe he has gone to be with the Lord. We pray that his gallant soul will continue to rest in the bosom of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom he heartily believes. Amen.
23. I thank you all for your attention.
24. May it please My Lords.

  
**Yakubu Chonoko Maikyau, OON, SAN**  
PRESIDENT