

THE ABUJA DECLARATION ON LAW, JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT

We, African jurists and lawyers, meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, from 4th to 7th February 2003, at the All Africa Conference on Law, Justice and Development

HAVING CONSIDERED THAT:

1. The rule of law, justice, respect for fundamental rights, and development are inextricably linked;
2. Democracy in Africa and institutions established for that purpose can only be sustained through the observance of the rule of law and by a judicial system properly equipped to administer and deliver justice;
3. Democracy contributes to improvement in the delivery of justice, strengthens the independence of the judiciary, and contributes to mobilization of resources and of civil society in favour of justice;
4. Legal and judicial systems in many African States require reform in order to improve the justice system; however, insufficient resources have been provided by governments to ensure the delivery of equitable justice;

DO HEREBY PROCLAIM THAT:

5. The rule of law and the dispensation of equitable justice are the cornerstones for democracy and sustainable development;
6. The independence and security of judicial officers, lawyers, and the Bar are indispensable to an equitable legal and judicial system;
7. The provision of adequate resources is essential for safeguarding the rule of law and justice; and
8. Justice may be delivered through the use of alternative mechanisms for the resolution of disputes.

TOWARDS THESE ENDS, WE HEREBY RESOLVE THAT:

9. Adequate human, financial, and material resources be provided for the judiciary, for the administration of justice, and for legal and judicial reforms;
10. The appointment, advancement, and removal of judges, as well as their conditions of service, shall not be politicized;
11. The dignity of the Judiciary and its social responsibility shall be upheld through the adoption and enforcement of codes of judicial conduct with a view to eliminate corruption;
12. Efforts for regional integration and cooperation, including the harmonization of laws and the mobilization of resources for these purposes, shall be sustained;
13. Original and continuing legal training for judges and lawyers shall be designed appropriately to achieve the desired goal of delivering efficient and equitable justice;
14. The involvement of civil society in strengthening the justice system and the administration of justice be supported;
15. Efforts to increase access to justice, especially for the poor, powerless, and disadvantaged, including the establishment of legal aid services and pro bono representation be expanded;
16. A network for improvement of African legal and judicial systems be established and maintained so as to ensure continuity of the aims and aspirations of this Conference;
17. The African Union be encouraged to undertake all measures necessary to ensure that the African Court of Human Rights becomes operational expeditiously;

18. African Heads of State be requested to convene urgently a summit dedicated to issues pertaining to justice, fundamental rights, and their impact on poverty reduction and sustainable development in Africa;
19. The Conference of Chief Justices of Africa be convened to reinforce regional cooperation and exchange experiences from their respective jurisdictions;
20. The 7th day of February, being the date of adoption of this Declaration, be commemorated each year as 'African Justice Day' with appropriate activities.

**ADOPTED IN ABUJA, NIGERIA, THIS 7TH DAY OF FEBRUARY 2003,
IN THE ENGLISH AND FRENCH LANGUAGES.**

**Signed: The Honorable Justice Muhammadu Lawal Uwais,
Chief Justice of Nigeria and Chairman of the Coalition of African Jurists**