

PRESS STATEMENT

Attack on Port Harcourt Court Signals Danger for Nigerian Democracy

The Honourable, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Hon. Mr. Justice Walter Samuel Nkanu Onnoghen, GCON, has been informed of an attack on the Port Harcourt High Court complex on Friday, 11th May, 2018.

According to the reports, this attack took place as Judges, Magistrates, staff and lawyers reported for duty at the said Rivers State High Court Complex in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital. Judicial and non-Judicial staff were denied access to the Complex as all the gates had been padlocked and the buildings surrounded by hoodlums.

These hoodlums, who were said to be heavily armed, reportedly inflicted bodily harm to Judicial Officers and other staff of the Judiciary going about their lawful duties and destroyed some properties belonging to the Judiciary.

This action was aimed at stopping the Court from sitting and delivering a ruling in an intra-party dispute of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in respect of the Local Government congresses of the party in the State.

This latest act of intimidation of the judiciary and the unwarranted violence against a peaceful institution of an Arm of Government is quite disturbing. More importantly, such show of shame ought not to be encouraged by right thinking members of the Nigerian Public.

If the enemies of our peace and democracy succeed or get away with what occurred at the High Court in Port-Harcourt, it would be a source of encouragement to them to do same to the court of Appeal, and ultimately, the Supreme Court of Nigeria, whenever any one of them perceives that a judgment may be delivered against any of them or the interests they represent.

The Judiciary remains the last hope of man, and our Judges and Judicial Officers are called upon to remain true to their Oath of Office. They must remain focused, resolute, and courageous, regardless of the effort at intimidating them.

The Nigerian Public is urged to continue to have faith in the Judiciary of the Nation. Any person with a legitimate complaint against another person, organisation or institution is advised to employ the civilized and legal mode of redress as contained and guaranteed by our Constitution. Whoever is dissatisfied with the outcome of decisions of our Courts of

Law has the right of appeal as Constitutionally guaranteed. The Judiciary will never fail in its duties.

Violence, the type visited on the Judiciary of Rivers State is alien to any civilized society and therefore condemnable.

The Hon. CJN, therefore, strongly condemns this attack on the Judiciary and notes with grave concern that this magnitude of violence could be visited on the Judiciary during a Ward/Local Government intra-party primary election, and wonders what the situation would be during the forthcoming general elections in 2019.

The Chief Justice, however, commends security agencies for bringing the chaos under control, thereby allowing the Judge to go ahead and deliver the ruling on the matter, but warns that attacks on the Judiciary is a disaster that would end democracy in Nigeria as parties would resort to self-help in the absence of the Judiciary or confidence in the Judiciary as an arbiter.

The CJN also seizes this opportunity to reiterate the commitment of the Judiciary to expeditious hearing of all political matters to avoid escalating political tension in the nation.

The Hon. Chief Justice of Nigeria, finally, advises Judicial Officers to go about their lawful duties without fear or favour.

Awassam Bassey, JP

Senior Special Assistant to Hon. CJNI on Media

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