

# Ensure Women, Children have Unhindered Access to Justice Anywhere in Nigeria, Women Lawyers tell Government

Akinwale Akintunde

African Women Lawyers Association (AWLA), has implored government at all levels, to be more deliberate and intentional towards ensuring that women and children have unhindered access to justice, anywhere in Nigeria.

In order to achieve this and protect the rights of children, prevail over violence to abuse them, the group advocated for a one stop justice system for women and children, with special Federal courts with one jurisdiction and power to deal with any matter involving abuse of women and children, anywhere in Nigeria.

AWLA also called for an adequate support structure for victims of abuse, adding that, they must not be subjected to double jeopardy for reporting.

"They must be supported and protected, all the way. Compensation for victims of abuse, and especially, child defilement. They are victims of, a failed society."

AWLA made this call through its President, Mrs. Mandy Demechi-Asagba, at the annual celebration of AWLA Parley with the theme, 'Zero Tolerance Towards Child Abuse'

AWLA Parley is a programme which brings together everyone, including Lawyers, women, children, other NGOs and likeminded stakeholders, to discuss on common ground, in order to raise awareness and collaborate on the way forward for women and children.

Speaking at the Parley, AWLA President, Demechi-Asagba, said the 2019 theme was apt because it is centred on the leaders of tomorrow.

She expressed serious concern, at the alarming increase of women and child abuse across the country.

"It is so glaring, as every day in the media, whether offline or online, we know how child abuse has reached an alarming rate, which takes place in different circumstances and settings. Child abuse and molestation keeps evolving from child labour to child prostitution, child marriage, child sexual violence, child trafficking, child abduction or kidnapping, domestic violence, child torture, indecent treatment of boys and girls, procuring abortion for children, and many more child-related crimes. Even the physically disabled children, are not exempted.

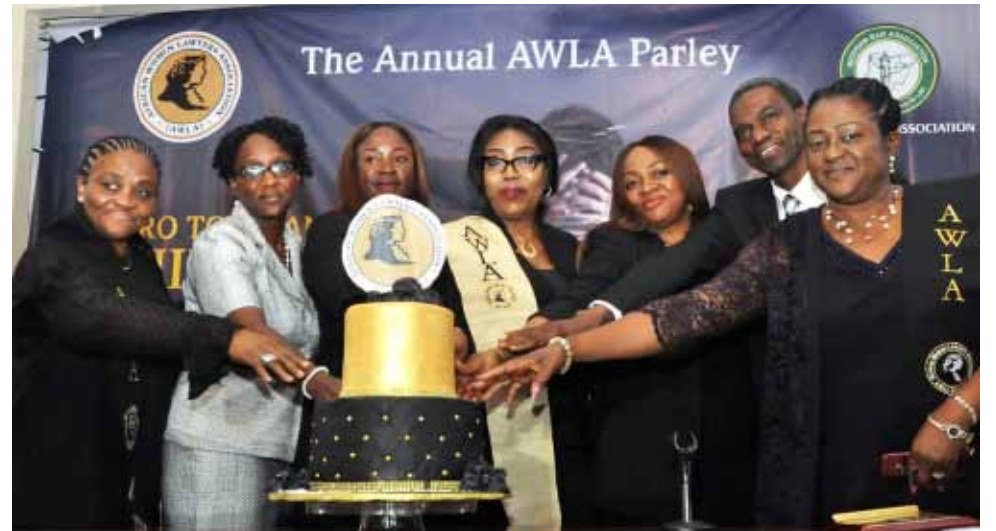
"What about children who are stigmatised

for their colour, sex, race, tribe and medical condition? Sadly, these abusive acts are perpetrated by parents, guardians, neighbours, friends, strangers, teachers, and persons in positions of trust and power.

"Instances of child abuse vary, which includes narratives such as when a woman was arrested by the gender unit desk of the Nigeria Police, for locking an orphan child in a dog cage. Another sad instance, was when a woman killed her daughter for stealing the sum of N350. What about endless torture on children, employed by housemaids?

"Child neglect, is also an instance of child abuse. Depriving children of education and quality healthcare, is a disservice to children and the nation. Some parents and family members, starve their children. They go further to inflict bruises and lacerations, on children. They murder disabled children. They sell their children, and commit other crimes against the child. Homeless children are roaming the streets, with no hope for the future. Abused children, do not have access to shelter and justice. So, what is the role of the African Women Lawyers Association, in all these sad pictures being painted here?"

"At this stage, and as we strive to protect the rights of children and prevail over violence to abused children, we implore the Government at all levels, to be more deliberate and intentional towards ensuring that women and children have unhindered access to justice anywhere and everywhere in Nigeria, as we propose a one-stop justice system for women and children with special Federal courts with one jurisdiction, and power to deal with any matter connected to, or relating to women and children anywhere in Nigeria; adoption of a monistic approach to applicability of any international convention, treatise and protocol pertaining to, and or relating to women and children, thus, automatically incorporating ratified international Conventions, Treatise and Protocols into our National corpus juris, in order not to shut out women and children from non-compliant States from justice, using the model of Section 245 C (2) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (third alteration as amended 2010), in relation to Labour matters; adequate support structure for victims. They must not be subjected to double jeopardy, for reporting. They must be supported and protected all the way,



L-R: Coordinator, AWLA Cross River State, Mrs. Theresa Ibas, Guest Speaker, Her Honour Magistrate Folarin Williams, Bukola Akinloye, representing the Wife of Lagos State Governor, Her Excellency, Dr. Mrs. Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu, AWLA President, Mandy Asagba, AWLA Regional Coordinator (South South), Mrs. Efe Etomi, Guest Speaker on Plea Bargain, Mr. Akin George, representing RoLAC and Lagos State Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice and NBA Vice President, Foluke Dada



Mrs. Efe Etomi, receiving the Award of Excellence on behalf of the First Lady of Edo State, Her Excellency Mrs Betsy Obaseki for her selfless and outstanding commitment and contributions to the welfare of the Nigerian Woman

and compensation for victims of abuse and especially, child defilement. They are victims of a failed society.

"If we must end the spate of terror unleashed on children and women, we must take decisive steps", Demechi-Asagba stated.

## Legal Personality of the Week James A James Esq.

# 'A Lawyer must study, as if his last breath depends on it'

**Please, give a brief introduction of yourself.**

My name is James A James Esq, a native of Nkoro town in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area of Rivers State. I attended Springfield Nursery School, Borikiri and proceeded to State School 1, Township School Moscow Road, Port Harcourt for my primary education. Subsequently, I attended Enitonna High School, Borikiri, where I had my secondary education. After my SSCE and JAMB, I got admission to study law at the University of Calabar in Cross River State, where I obtained my Bachelor of law degree. Thereafter, I proceeded to the Nigerian Law School (Kano Campus) for my BL, and was called the Bar in 2011. I did my compulsory NYSC in Abia State, at the Judicial Service Commission, Umuahia. I got married to a colleague in 2015, and we are now blessed with a son.

I started my legal practice with Chief M.B.R Urombo of Metong & Metong Fulfillment Chambers, and later, I moved to A. A. Brown & Co. Currently, my wife and I practice in our Chambers, St. James Legal Consult, within Port Harcourt metropolis.



James A James Esq

**Have you had any challenge on your career as a Lawyer, and if so, what were the main challenges?**

Yes, I have had challenges as a Lawyer. As a new-commer into the profession,

working under a principal who was conservative with knowledge, my legal practice was extremely limited.

**What was your worst day as a Lawyer?**

My worst day as a Lawyer, was actually my first day in court, where I personally conducted a matter before Hon. Justice B.A. Georgewill, now Justice of the Court of Appeal. He threw so many questions at me, that even the senior colleagues sitting beside me in court that day, could not be of help. To put it mildly, that day that I first appeared in court on my won to conduct a matter, I was judicially baptised!

**What is your most memorable experience as a Lawyer?**

My most memorable experience as a Lawyer so far, was the day I cross-examined a Senior Advocate of Nigeria in the witness box.

**Who has been most influential in you life?**

My darling wife, has been the most influential person in my life.

**Why did you become a Lawyer?**

I became a Lawyer because I grew up in a neighbourhood where there was so much oppression of the poor, and this consequently, heightened my passion to stand for the oppressed, indigent and the voiceless.

**What would be your advice to anyone wanting a career in law?**

Becoming a Lawyer is an exciting and noble dream, but one must be prepared, to study as if your last breath depends on it. Aspiring Lawyers, should not be discouraged by the legal challenges ahead.

**If you had not become a Lawyer, what other career would you have chosen?**

I would have chosen to be a footballer. I feel fulfilled when I use my experience and skills, to make people happy and relax.

**Where do you see yourself in ten years?**

I see myself at the echelon of legal practice, and a frontline human rights activist, celebrated across the globe.