

**SPEECH BY HON. JUSTICE CROMWELL
OSAMWONYI IDAHOSA CHIEF JUDGE,
EDO STATE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
VALEDICTORY COURT SESSION TO MARK
HIS RETIREMENT FROM SERVICE**

PROTOCOLS

I most sincerely thank the Almighty for today, for giving me the grace to see today. It is by His Grace that we live.

THE BEGINNING

The journey that brought me to this point in time began on the 2nd day of June, 1993 when I was sworn in, along with three other gentlemen as a Judge of the High Court of Edo State. The others are Hon. Justice M. I. Edokpayi, Hon. Justice V.A.O. Omage and Hon. Justice D. Hayble.

Hon. Justice M. I. Edokpayi went on to become the Chief Judge of Edo State until he unfortunately passed on. Hon. Justice V.A.O. Oimage retired as a Justice of the Court of Appeal while Hon. Justice D. Hayble retired as a Judge of the High Court.

As stated in the Holy Bible in the Book of Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3 verse I:

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

The 2nd day of June, 1993 was the day for me to begin my life on the Bench, and after 23 years 7 months and 23 days, the time has come for me to vacate my seat on the Bench.

It was an honour, without parallel, and a privilege without comparison for me to have been called upon to

serve in the capacity of a Judge of the High Court and later as the Chief Judge of the State. Everyday I sat on that Bench, I silently thanked God for the honour and privilege.

I was born on Friday, the 25th day of January, 1952 precisely 65 years ago, into the great Orokhiri Family, of Ibiwe Street, Benin City.

My paternal forebears originally came from Usen, now in Ovia South West Local Government Area of Edo State.

My profile is well stated in the photospeak magazine already distributed, and it will suffice it to say that my father Perry Ikponmwosa Idahosa, who was a teacher died while I was a young boy. He was a

fantastic footballer according to all who knew him. My mother Eunice Omosede Edokpayi, was at different times a trader and a seamstress. A very hardworking woman, who was able, in her lifetime, to build two houses. She was a very beautiful woman and she never lost her beauty.

I had another father, the Hon Justice Joseph Oghogho Idahosa, my father's elder brother. Upon the early demise of his younger brother, he took over all the responsibilities of bringing me up as his own son.

SCHOOL YEARS

I was enrolled into the Immaculate Conception College, Benin City, a Roman Catholic run secondary

school of great distinction, in 1964 and graduated from that school in 1969.

In class one; we had an Irish teacher, Mr. Murtagh, who was our English Language teacher. He insisted that we write and speak the language correctly. I learnt a lot from him.

Upon graduation from Immaculate Conception College, Benin City, I proceeded to Edo College for my Higher School. But I only spent one year and seven months there. This is because, I left for the University of Ife, Ile-Ife after passing the concessional entrance examination.

At the end of the first year, I was one of the two best students in my class and that was how I won a full Federal

Government of Nigeria scholarship to read my Law Degree programme.

After my university education in 1975, I proceeded to the Law School for the B.L. programme, which I finished in 1976. I was called to the Bar in July 1976.

I was posted to the Cross River State of Nigeria for my National Youth Service, which I dutifully performed in the Cross Rivers State Ministry of Justice office at Ikot Ekpene.

In August, 1977 I started practice with Chief Christopher O. Ihensekhien, in his office known as C. O. Ihensekhien & Co. Actually I had planned to get employed in the then Bendel State Ministry of Justice. I attended the interview and was accepted.

WORKING LIFE

When I informed my uncle, he asked me why I wanted to work in the Ministry. I told him that, in the Ministry I would be given a car loan to buy a car. He then said that he would buy me a car, to enable me work in the private sector where I would gain experience faster. He actually bought me a brand new car.

This was the second time my uncle was acting as a great mentor to me. The first time was when he advised me to read law which is the king of the Arts, since I wanted to read Arts. I had planned to read journalism, to be a great journalist like Peter Pan and other great Journalists of those days.

I worked with Chief C. O. Ihensekhien for two years and seven months, before I set up my own chambers in February 1980.

In C. O. Ihensekhien, I learnt a lot about the legal profession. I got to know that you have to work very hard. Sometimes, in those days, weekends were spent in the office, not to talk of working quite late almost on a daily basis.

The pay was low, but I enjoyed the work and I was supported by my uncle and my family. I was not married, so I was free from the pressure most young men of my age faced.

When however, I started my own office things were different, but I had staff to look after.

I practiced law on my own till other young men later joined me. Solomon Odiase Esq. and Henry Idahagbon Esq. (immediate past Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, Edo State) worked with me.

MARRIAGE

After several years of practice, I met my wife Mrs. Adesuwa Helyn Idahosa, through her friend, Mrs. Felicia Ogbeide, who introduced us. After a long time, we finally came together and got married on 31/3/84.

ROAD TO THE BENCH

My father-in-law late Pa Isaac Omoregbee, a retired Commissioner of Police, was the one who first asked me if I would not like to be a Judge. This was in

1986, before his demise in 1987; I replied that I was too young to be a judge.

In 1993, Solomon Eghobamien Esq. who was then a member of the Bendel State Judicial Service Commission asked me if I would like to be a judge. This is because the Commission wanted credible lawyers of Benin origin to be appointed Judges.

I asked for time to confer with my family. My wife, my mother, uncle, grandmother were all unanimous in support of the idea.

Another very senior lawyer K.O. Longe Esq, (Life Bencher) also asked me the same question.

Finally the State Chief Judge, Hon. J.O. Akhigbe summoned me to his office and put the question to me. Again I asked for time to confer with my family.

His Lordship told me to come back in two or three days time with my C.V. if I am ready to be a Judge. I then submitted my Curriculum Vitae Later I heard the radio announcement that I had been appointed a Judge.

I was sworn in alongside Hon. Justices M. I. Edokpayi, V.A.O. Oimage and D. Hayble.

LIFE ON THE BENCH

I was posted to Benin Judicial Division after I was sworn in, before Chief John Odigie-Oyegun the then Governor of Edo State. At that time, our papers did not have to go to Abuja.

I immediately set about my work. My erstwhile colleagues accorded me great respect and cooperated with me immensely. As a practitioner of many years, I understood the difficulties lawyers faced and empathized with them. But then there were times I have to put my foot down.

While in Benin as a new Judge, I had the privilege of conducting two assizes. I think that was the last time an assize was conducted in Edo State.

MY STAY IN AUCHI JUDICIAL DIVISION

In July 1999, I was posted to the Auchi Judicial Division. There I met a Court that was for all intents and purposes comatose. After some months of consistent

sitting, the court woke up. I was sitting on Fridays contrary to the expectation of the lawyers and parties.

I am happy to note that just two days ago, the Chairman of the NJC and Acting Chief Justice of Nigeria sent a circular to all Heads of Court (to be circulated to all Judges) noting amongst other things that sitting of courts should be from Monday to Fridays. This is what I advocated and did way back between 1999 - 2004.

BACK TO BENIN CITY.

In December, 2004, I was posted back to Benin Judicial Division. But in March, 2005, there was a fire in one wing of the High Court. This was the wing where I had my court. All my personal books, wig and gown,

copies of my judgments/rulings till then were all destroyed.

With the co-operation of learned Counsel on both sides of all the pending causes, we were able to get the court going within a few weeks in another court room.

APPOINTED CHIEF JUDGE

In 2009, upon the sudden demise of the Hon. the Chief Judge, Hon. Justice M.I. Edokpayi, I was sworn in as the Acting Chief Judge. In March, the following year, i.e. 2010, I was sworn in as the substantive Chief Judge.

During my tenure as the Chief Judge, I did what I could to first, unite the Bench and then establish a firm cordial working relationship with the Bar.

As a leader, it is not possible to please everyone and in any event there will always be those who do not just like you for one reason or the other. There are also those that were not happy as a result of my decisions. To all these people, I ask you to find space in your hearts to forgive and forget. Life is too short for you to be bearing grudges. For all others, I thank you for your co-operation.

As the Chief Judge, I had the opportunity to implement several changes in the way things were done with a view to improving them.

One was the introduction of the directive that the Police should leave their case files with the Court Registrar, who would then photocopy it, and send same to the D.P.P.

This has virtually eradicated the cases of missing case files.

Another was the creation of the Criminal Court Division. This act, separated the Criminal cases from the Civil cases. The result is that the criminal cases are being heard and determined faster than ever before.

We have also laid the foundation for the take off of the family Court, in line with the provisions of the Child Rights Act 2007, which has been domesticated in Edo State.

We have laid the foundation for the use of the A.D.R. mechanism by the establishment of the Edo State Multi Door Court House. We have the practice Directions in place and the law is almost ready.

Also, during my tenure, the firm foundation for the use of ICT in the Judiciary was laid by the setting up of a website for the Edo State Judiciary, It is hoped that this will lead to electronic filing of processes in the near future.

Before my tenure, our Magistrates were not given official motor vehicles, indeed it was not part of their conditions of services. However as part of efforts to enhance the conditions of service of their learned Worships, the Governor approved that the provision of motor vehicles should be part of their conditions of service.

The first four cars were given out to three Magistrates and a President of an Area Customary Court.

Unfortunately no more cars were given out to their
Worships/Honours. The point to be stressed here is that
the foundation for cars being given out to
Magistrates/Presidents has been laid. It is now a matter of
implementation.

In order to attack and curb corruption in the Edo
State Judiciary, I set up the Inspectorate Division. The
Division is to monitor the courts and conduct
administrative review of instances of corruption. This
Division, I am happy to say, has already brought some
level of sanity to some areas in our system. It is my hope
that this Division will eventually reduce the incidence of
corrupt practices in the Judiciary of Edo State.

I want to say that the Acting C.J.N. in his circular letter of 17th January, 2017, at P.5 thereof, has directed that States/FCT Judicial Service Commissions/Committee are directed to appoint Court Inspectors, where there are none, to inspect and monitor all the lower Courts in the State. It seems we were ahead of this directive.

During my tenure, I made several visits to the Nigerian Prison formations in the three senatorial Districts in Edo State, during which several detained persons deserving of their freedom were set free or granted bail.

Although plans were made for the construction and rehabilitation of courts in Edo State, we were unable to carry out these plans due to the non availability of funds.

Similarly the residence of the State Chief Judge, which was started in my tenure could not be completed. However, I am happy to state that we were able to rehabilitate the High Court of Justice, Igarra by direct labour.

THE NEW RULES OF CIVIL PROCEDURE

Whilst a legal practitioner, we had serious issues with the Bendel State (Civil Procedure) Rules 1988. Upon my assumption of duties in 2009 as the Chief Judge, I revived the Committee set up earlier by Hon. Justice M.I. Edokpayi the Hon. the Chief Judge.

Finally, in 2012, we were able to present the Edo State (Civil Procedure) Rules 2012 to the public. The new Rules of Court brought radical changes to the way

cases were prepared, filed and conducted. It also speeded up the hearing and determination of cases.

We have had challenges during my tenure. Some of these challenges we managed to handle quite easily. The most difficult, was the JUSUN workers' strike that lasted from 2/1/15 to 8/7/15. Luckily it was finally resolved although the workers, who were not paid during the strike, are still asking and hoping to be paid for the period they were not paid.

It has been a great honour and privilege for me to have been called upon to serve in the capacity of a Judge and later as the Chief Judge of my dear State. Every day I sat on the Bench, I silently thanked God for the honour and privilege.

As a Chief Judge, I had the opportunity to sit as a member of the Board of Governors of the National Judicial Institute and a Member of the Body of Benchers. I also sat for 2 years as a Member of the National Judicial Council. These are the highest policy making bodies in the legal profession, in Nigeria.

I thank the Almighty God for giving me the grace to be able to maintain good working relationship with all the Judges in Edo State and beyond.

Similarly, I thank God for the good staff, He gave me to work with. I thank, most sincerely all my immediate staff, especially Mary Obaseki, my secretary for many years whose great memory helped me in no small measure. I thank members of many security detail

and PRO unit who travelled with me all over the country.

I thank my PA, Mr. Daniel Ojo who was like my extended arm.

I also thank most sincerely my drivers who drove me from place to place safely. I wish to appreciate their great maintenance culture.

My Orderly, Usman and my DSS detail were dedicated and loyal staff, I thank them.

My Chief Registrar H.I. Enemaku, a man who did his work in a fastidious manner, and his team of top management staff were very excellent men and women. I cannot forget to mention specially Nosa Musoe Esq. who handled the complex Litigation Department. He was responsible for our successful prison visits.

Our finance and accounts department and Probate Departments were manned by two excellent officers ó Mrs. Okunbor and Mr. Odigie respectively.

OTHER ARMS OF GOVERNMENT

I thank God for the good grace He gave me to be able to maintain a stable and good working relationship with the other arms of the Government of Edo State.

I must specially thank His Excellency Comrade Adams Aliyu Oshiomole MNI CON Governor, Edo State 2008 ó 2016. He was an excellent Governor, who had a great and deep insight into issues, but who could not do all the things he wanted to do. He is a friend that I shall always respect.

MY WIFE

My wife ó hmmm, what can I say. She has always been a pillar by my side. She is my confidant, advisor a prayer warrior. She is a blessing unto me.

MY CHILDREN

My children are wonderful children. They have not been a source of problems to me, rather they remain a source of joy, hope and inspiration. When I see them I am assured that they can continue with the torch. I am very proud of them.

LARGER FAMILY

We belong to the Ogebor Nøusen family. My extended family members are great people. They have always respected and shown deep love for me. They also

protected me. They also protected me by not making unlawful demands upon me during my tenure.

I cannot end this last speech without touching upon the events of early November, 2016. It was with utter shock that I heard the breaking news on the television.

With the revelations that have since followed, it is difficult to comment. Suffice it to say that a better way could have been found to deal with the issue of the festering corruption.

It is noteworthy that in Ghana, the Augean stable was cleaned, without throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Whatever may be the case, I must congratulate the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,

Muhammadu Buhari for his courage and doggedness in confronting, fighting and unearthing corruption wherever it may be.

THANKS FOR LISTENING

At this stage, I want to thank your Excellency Godwin Nogheghase Obaseki Governor of Edo State and his deputy Comrade Philip Shuaibu for patiently listening to my long speech. From my interaction with your Excellency, I am sure my successor shall have more success stories to tell on His valedictory.

I thank your Lordships the Hon. the Chief Judges that have travelled from far and near to be with us on this auspicious day. I pray God to grant you journey mercies back home.

Now that I am retired I will be able to visit all of you one by one.

I thank all the dignitaries who have had to sit through this speech. Thank you so much.

I thank my Lords that at the end of this ceremonies, shall receive me into their fold ó My lords retired but not tired.

I thank all their Lordships who shall continue sitting, especially the new Chief Judge, Hon. Justice Esohe Frances Ikponmwen. I wish you the very best.

As for my friends who has come here, I invited you as my friends to witness my finest hour. It can never be better than this for me. Thank you very much for honouring me, with your presence.

GOODBYE! GOODBYE!! GOODBYE!!!

May God bless All of Us.

**HON. JUSTICE C.O. IDAHOSA (RTD)
FORMER CHIEF JUDGE
EDO STATE
NIGERIA
25/1/2017**