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He became an expert on the laws of Rivers State of Nigeria, following his pioneering legal research he published in 1994 in his book, *Laws of Rivers State: A Comprehensive Guide*, the second edition of which he published in 2010.

Leesi is the publisher of the *Nigerian Lawyers Directory* (www.NigerianLawyersDirectory.com) which is an *absolutely free* professional legal directory that provides the secure online platform for all Nigerian lawyers and law firms to showcase their professional legal services and publications to bring them into global limelight for the benefit of Nigeria and Nigerians, and for national and international professional networking and beneficial collaboration. The *Nigerian Legal Research* division of the *Nigerian Lawyers Directory* promotes modern legal research in Nigeria for free.

Additionally, Leesi uses his *Nigerian Lawyers Directory* website to provide free access to various aspects of Nigerian laws (public legal information). He advocates that *the right to know the law is a human right of all human beings*.

Press Statement

No Government Should Fund The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA): A Sociological Reflection On Governor Nyesom Ezenwo Wike's Decision To Withdraw Government Support For The Professional Body

By Leesi Ebenezer Mitee

Sometime in November 2019, last month, the Nigerian press carried the news of a statement by the Governor of Rivers State, His Excellency Chief (Barr.) Nyesom Ezenwo Wike CON, which they claimed read thus: "We have withdrawn all our support and patronage for the NBA [Nigerian Bar Association] in Rivers State, including the promise to support the hosting of the 2020 National Conference of the NBA in Port Harcourt." The press further reported that Governor Wike made the above statement in Port Harcourt while he was addressing a special court session of the formal opening of the 2019/2020 Legal Year of the Rivers State Judiciary.

The above-quoted statement has generated an enthusiastic expression of diverse opinions, especially among Nigerian lawyers, on its propriety and its implications for the Nigerian Bar Association, nationwide. This press statement now seeks to address the missing dimension to the debate on the implications of Governor Wike's policy statement. That missing dimension is its sociological perspective, devoid of any political connotations or undertone.

It is significant to note or know that the Nigerian Bar Association is arguably the richest professional association in Nigeria, and it boasts a dizzying number of lawyers as its members. According to its official website, "The NBA has a membership of **over** 105,406 lawyers active in 125 Branches across the 36 states, including the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria" (emphasis added). Its multitude of members pay compulsory **annual** statutory practice fees, whose current 2019 rates (available on the www.nigerianbar.org.ng Nigerian Bar Association website) are as follows: Senior Advocates & Honourable Benchers (₦50,000.00); legal practitioners of 15 years and above post-call (₦25,000.00); legal practitioners of 10–14 years post-call (₦17,500.00); legal practitioners of 5–9 years post-call (₦10,000.00); and legal practitioners of 0–4 years post-call (₦5,000.00). The Nigerian Bar Association members' funds for the **quarter** ended 30 April 2019, for example, totalled ₦2.5 billion. Clearly, the Nigerian Bar Association is capable of funding its operations and activities if it utilises its resources prudently.

Therefore, as the Nigerian Bar Association is a rich and an elitist professional body, no level or tier of government in Nigeria (local, state, and federal) should fund it. Many Nigerians live in difficult circumstances, without access to safe potable water, medical care, electricity, education, housing, etc. Many are unemployed and have no means of livelihood. Many are helpless, hopeless, and hapless. Many are hungry and are not sure of their next meal. Government funds should therefore be used for the welfare of the Nigerian masses. Every government exists for the welfare of the people, the whole society, from whom it derives legitimacy and to whom it is logically, naturally, morally, legally, and divinely accountable.

The decision of Governor Wike, who himself is a senior member of the Nigerian Bar Association, to withdraw all government support for the professional body therefore has profound salutary sociological implications for good governance and the welfare of Nigerians, all Nigerians. All levels or tiers of government throughout Nigeria should consider adopting that decision, as a matter of policy, for the welfare of the Nigerian masses. The people's welfare is supreme; yes, it is.

Dated this 6th Day of December 2019

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