KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF MR. JOHN CHIKE ONYIDO, ON THE EVENT THEME "*EMERGING LEGAL AREAS AND THE ROLE OF THE 21ST CENTURY LAWYER,*" FOR THE 3RD EDITION OF THE ALL NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES NATIONAL ADVOCACY COMPETITION (ANUNAC) ORGANISED BY THE MOOTING SOCIETY, UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS AND IFELAW MOOT AND MOCK COMMITTEE

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished Guests,
Esteemed Faculty Members,

It is an honor to be here today representing Mr. John Onyido, a distinguished intellectual property practitioner, having been invited by the Moot and Mock bodies of two prestigious universities, to deliver this keynote address at the 3rd edition of the All Nigerian Universities National Advocacy Competition (ANUNAC) for 2024. I would like to extend my gratitude to the Mooting Society of the University of Lagos and the IFELAW Moot and Mock Committee for organizing this significant event.

As we gather here to celebrate advocacy, a cornerstone of our legal system, it is fitting that we discuss the future of our profession and the evolving landscape in which we operate. The theme of this event is crucial as we navigate the complexities of the 21st-century legal landscape. As emerging legal areas continue to evolve, there are several key factors that a modern lawyer must consider to excel in this dynamic environment.

In this brief keynote address, I will explore the emerging legal areas and the pivotal role of the 21st-century lawyer in broad strokes. The legal profession is at a transformative juncture, shaped by rapid technological advancements, global interconnectivity, and shifting societal values. This transformation is creating new opportunities and challenges that demand a proactive and adaptive mindset from all legal practitioners.

SOME EMERGING LEGAL AREAS

1. Technology Law

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Automation are very crucial in today's evolving digital world. As legal practitioners and law students, we need to understand the impact of AI on legal research, document review, predictive analytics and stay updated on regulations governing AI use and application. In addition to this, familiarity with legal issues

surrounding blockchain technologies, smart contracts, and digital currency regulations are vital. Artificial intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing industries, including law and legal practice. AI-powered tools can enhance legal research, contract analysis, case prediction and significantly shorten the time required to accomplish tasks. However, the use of AI raises important ethical questions regarding programming bias, transparency, and accountability in AI deployment. Lawyers must navigate these ethical challenges while leveraging AI to improve their practice. Understanding AI's impact on the legal profession and advocating for responsible AI use are critical.

2. Data Protection Law

The digital age has ushered in unprecedented innovations and, consequently, opened up new legal frontiers. Issues related to data privacy, cybersecurity, and digital rights are now at the forefront of legal discourse. Lawyers today must navigate complex laws and regulations surrounding data protection, such as the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023, Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) 2019, alongside its Implementation Framework as well as international frameworks like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The rise in cybercrimes also necessitates a robust understanding of data protection laws to protect individuals and organizations and ensure regulatory compliance by law firms and other entities.

3. Intellectual Property Law

The present creative and technological boom has amplified the significance of intellectual property (IP) law. As Nigeria continues to foster innovation and creativity through the introduction of appropriate policies, protecting intellectual property rights and navigating IP issues in software development, biotechnology, and other tech-driven industries becomes crucial. Lawyers specializing in IP law play a critical role in safeguarding the interests of creators, inventors, and businesses, ensuring that their contributions are adequately protected and rewarded. Protecting digital content and understanding the legal aspects of copyright, trademarks, and patents in the digital age is crucial. Other important aspects of IPRs to developing economies and indigenous communities include being conversant and updated on recent developments in the fields of Traditional Knowledge, Traditional Cultural Expressions, Geographical Indications, Appellations of Origin and the regulation of new plant varieties either by extending protections available in more established IP fields or through a *sui generis* regime.

4. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

With the increasing complexity of legal disputes and the need for efficient resolution mechanisms, ADR has gained prominence in recent times. Mediation, arbitration, and negotiation are becoming preferred methods for resolving commercial conflicts without

the prolonged and often adversarial nature of courtroom battles. Lawyers proficient in ADR techniques are essential in facilitating amicable solutions and maintaining professional/business relationships. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the judicial authorities of most jurisdictions have adopted virtual hearings and virtual ADR settlement mechanisms which litigants and legal professionals can adopt to facilitate proceedings and resolve disputes expeditiously.

5. Environmental and Climate Change Law

As the world grapples with environmental challenges and climate change, environmental law is gaining prominence. This area encompasses regulations on pollution control, natural resource management, and climate change mitigation. Lawyers must be knowledgeable about international environmental treaties, national regulations, and corporate sustainability practices. Advocating for stronger environmental protections and helping clients navigate environmental compliance requirements are crucial roles for lawyers in this field.

6. Fintech and Cryptocurrency

The financial sector is undergoing a transformation with the rise of fintech and cryptocurrencies. Legal professionals must understand the regulatory frameworks governing digital currencies, blockchain technology, and online financial services. This includes issues related to money laundering, consumer protection, financial inclusion and cross-border transactions. Specializing in fintech law or scaling up in this field can provide opportunities to work with innovative startups and established financial institutions.

7. Health Law and Bioethics

Advancements in healthcare technology and biotechnology are raising new legal and ethical questions. Health law covers areas such as telemedicine, genetic testing, and patient data access, control and privacy. Bioethics addresses issues related to medical research, organ transplantation, access to and use of patient medical data and end-of-life care. Lawyers in this field must understand the interplay between legal regulations and ethical considerations in healthcare.

THE ROLE OF THE 21ST CENTURY LAWYER

In navigating these emerging areas, the 21st-century lawyer must embody several key attributes:

1. **Adaptability and continuous learning**

The fact that the legal landscape is continuously evolving is a non-variable constant. Lawyers and aspiring legal professionals must stay abreast of new laws, technologies, and societal changes. Continuous professional development and lifelong learning are

imperative to remain relevant and effective. Undertaking continuous professional trainings, skills acquisition and obtaining relevant certifications play a crucial role in broadening the knowledge and skillset of the 21st century lawyer. Training programs and certifications provide structured learning experiences that cover a wide range of topics relevant to your area of practice, including staying abreast of evolving legal frameworks, best practices, technical solutions, and emerging trends etc.

2. **Technological Proficiency**

Embracing technology is no longer optional; it is a necessity. Legal practitioners and budding lawyers must leverage legal tech tools for research, case management, and client communication. Understanding the interplay of blockchain, artificial intelligence, and data protection is crucial for providing competent legal services in today's digital world. Creating a strong market presence digitally and employing social media platforms to engage relevant audiences is vital in showcasing your areas of expertise and advertising your thought leadership in these sectors.

3. **Specialization in Emerging Legal Fields**

The legal landscape is witnessing the rise of new fields such as fintech, intellectual property, environmental law, data privacy etc., as highlighted above. Specializing in these emerging areas can distinguish you from your peers and open new career pathways. Pursuing relevant certifications, engaging in continuous education, and staying updated with the latest developments in these domains are prerequisites for building a niche practice area.

4. **Interdisciplinary Knowledge**

The complexities of modern legal issues often intersect with other fields such as economics, technology, and environmental science. Lawyers should cultivate interdisciplinary knowledge to provide comprehensive legal solutions and collaborate effectively with experts from other domains.

5. **Global Perspective**

Legal issues increasingly transcend national borders. International law, trade agreements, and cross-border disputes require lawyers to have a global outlook. Understanding different legal systems and cultural contexts enhances a lawyer's ability to navigate international legal challenges.

6. **Ethical Integrity**

Amidst the pressures of modern practice, maintaining ethical integrity is paramount. Upholding the rule of law, advocating for justice, and maintaining professional ethics are the bedrock of the legal profession. Legal professionals must act as stewards of justice

and defenders of the public good. They must manage their client's needs and aspirations effectively to ensure that these are accomplished in accordance with legal prescriptions and regulatory requirements.

7. **Client-Centric Approach**

In the competitive legal market, a client-centric approach is more critical than ever. Understanding client needs, providing personalized services, and maintaining transparent and responsive communication can set you apart from the competition. Leveraging technology to enhance client interactions, such as through client portals and virtual consultations, can significantly improve client satisfaction and retention. Clients are appreciative of professionals who not only guide them effectively in achieving their business goals, but especially those who can do so while managing costs and expenses carefully.

Conclusion

As we reflect on these emerging legal areas and the evolving role of lawyers, it is clear that we are entering an era of profound change and opportunity. The 21st-century lawyer must be a versatile, technologically savvy, and ethically grounded professional, ready to tackle the challenges presented, and seize the opportunities that lie ahead. The multi-dimensional knowledge required of a modern day legal practitioner does not translate to being a generalist or a 'jack of all trades'. The modern era requires deep knowledge of your chosen field of practice that comes with specialization but set up against the framework of the changing commercial and technological environment.

To the students here today, you are the future of our profession. Embrace these changes with curiosity and courage. Strive to make a positive impact in whatever legal path you choose. Your ingenuity, adaptability, and dedication will shape the future of law in Nigeria and beyond.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to witnessing the remarkable contributions you will make to the legal profession and society.

Thank you!

31st May 2024.