



NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT: Plot 1102, Muhammed Buhari Way, Cadastral Zone A00, Central Business District, Abuja Nigerian Tel: +234 800 333 1111
www.nigerianbar.org.ng

STATEMENT BY THE NBA PRESIDENT, MR. OLUMIDE AKPATA, ON THE COLLECTION OF CONFERENCE MATERIALS AT THE NBA ANNUAL GENERAL CONFERENCE 2022

Dear Colleagues,

1. I write further to my previous statement and those issued by the Chairman of the Technical Committee on Conference Planning, Mr. Tobenna Erojikwe, in respect of the above subject.
2. It is public knowledge that the 2022 Annual General Conference of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA-AGC) encountered a glitch in the area of collection of conference materials (particularly the bags) when a percentage of the conference delegates (estimated to be about 20% of those physically present) did not receive their conference bags in good time, and therefore had their conference experience severely hampered.
3. The inconvenience caused to our members is deeply regretted, and I wish to once again officially apologise to our members and generality of Nigerians for what was clearly an embarrassment. As explained below, this was the exact opposite of what we intended to achieve.
4. Understandably, this unfortunate incident has led to various theories. On our part, we decided that it was more important, in the first instance, to devote all resources to the resolution of the issues to a reasonable extent and thereafter provide a comprehensive explanation to our members. Having actualised that, please see below what truly transpired.
5. In a bid to ensure that our members receive the best value for money and in consonance with the NBA-AGC Conference theme of "BOLD TRANSITIONS", we engaged the services of a general merchants and trading company, **Antoche Limited** to supply high quality bags to our members. Based on previous experience, we placed orders for a total of 13,000 bags - more than enough for the registered in-person delegates.
6. Contrary to insinuations from different quarters, the leadership of the NBA and TCCP had no prior knowledge of the company and/or any relationship with its CEO, **Martha Okopi** before engaging its services. The decision to engage

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the company was taken after I received a similar bag as an end of year corporate gift from one of the country's leading organisations, and its quality prompted a decision that our members were deserving of a similar gift.

7. I directed the TCCP to inquire into the company that supplied the bags. The TCCP conducted its due diligence and confirmed that indeed the company had a track record of supplying reputable organisations like MTN and PWC, and thereafter the supplier successfully passed through our procurement process.
8. Despite the prohibitive costs, the bags were the first items to be procured for the conference and Antoche Limited was the first vendor to be engaged, as far back as April 2022 (four months ahead of the AGC). By the terms of the contract, the vendor was to supply the materials at least one month to the conference opening date. On our part, we ensured that we did everything possible to prevent delay, including paying over 75% of the agreed cost for the supply before the start of the conference.
9. As things turned out, we subsequently realised that we were dealing with a less than honest vendor. Firstly, the supplier began with endless excuses for their inability to supply the bags as and when due. After a while, they informed the TCCP that all the bags were now in-country and stored at a warehouse pending delivery to the agreed drop off point. This turned out to be false.
10. Secondly, contrary to the agreement and despite repeated follow up, the company supplied only approximately 5,350 bags on the eve of conference while insisting erroneously that they had supplied 8,000 bags. After repeated checks, the supplier finally admitted that it had not supplied 8,000 bags and conceded that not all the bags had arrived from the country of importation.
11. In the course of distributing the bags on Monday 22nd August 2022, the TCCP realised that Martha Okopi and her company had taken advantage of the rush to supply over 1,000 bags that did not meet the standards and specifications agreed with the company. The price differential between the bags that we ordered and off-specification bags that were supplied was nearly 50%. The TCCP therefore had no choice but to reject them. It was at this point that the TCCP took the decision to pause the distribution of bags and to ensure that the vendor delivers the correct bags.
12. On Tuesday 23rd August 2022, using our goodwill, we were able to secure the release of additional 3,500 bags from the custody of the Nigerian Aviation Handling Company and the Nigeria Customs Service where the bags were being kept due to the supplier's failure or delay in paying import duties. It was in the process of attempting to offload these bags and distribute them to our members, that we witnessed the unfortunate and disgraceful scenes where several lawyers

broke into the registration point, vandalised properties and carted away most of the available conference bags and materials.

13. The supplier was present throughout the melee and witnessed first-hand what we predicted would happen if our members did not get their bags. Yet, when the TCCP paid an unannounced visit to the location where the supplier was branding the bags around 3am on Wednesday 24th August 2022, we discovered that the supplier was branding very inferior backpack (even less inferior to the ones rejected) ostensibly in a bid to hide them under the bags that it was contracted to supply. We have taken a decision to not only blacklist Antoche Limited and its proprietors as contractors to the NBA, but to exercise our legal rights against them to the fullest extent possible.
14. Dear colleagues and conference delegates, this is the detailed account of what transpired. While our members, especially those who were affected, have rightly complained about the inconvenience they suffered, I urge you to show some empathy to the TCCP who did their best in the circumstance. Some of the glitches noticed during the conference were as a result of the fact that many TCCP members were forced to abandon their primary assignments and were drafted into the team working on resolving this emergency.
15. In ending, as I pledged during the Annual General Meeting yesterday, I will, as my first NBA assignment post my handover, work with the incoming NBA President Mr. Y. C. Maikyau, SAN and his team to ensure that all conference delegates, especially the groups, who are yet to receive their bags will have their bags delivered to them at their various destinations, at no cost to the delegates.
16. Once again please accept our most sincere apologies. I wish you safe travels as your journey back.



OLUMIDE AKPATA

President

26th August 2022