

CLASFON PRESIDENTS' REPORT PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE CHRISTIAN LAWYERS FELLOWSHIP OF NIGERIA (CLASFON) HELD THIS 7TH DAY OF AUGUST 2021 AT SFI CONVENTION NKPOR UMUOJI ROAD, ONITSHA, ANAMBRA STATE.

1. INTRODUCTION

Greetings in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. By the grace of God, we are meeting this day two years after our last AGM on 10th August 2019 at Alumni Hall, University of Ibadan. A lot has happened in CLASFON and in Nigeria within these two past years beyond telling but the LORD has helped us (1 Samuel 7:12). COVID-19 surfaced within the first quarter of 2020 and everything came to a standstill, but God showed us mercy. The level of insecurity in Nigeria has reached very alarming proportions but God is still showing us mercy. This report will avail members with information on the state of our Fellowship, the major activities within the period, the progress made so far, the challenges at hand and perhaps projections for the times ahead as may be determined by the new leadership that will emerge today.

2. STATE OF THE FELLOWSHIP

At the August 2019 AGM, the vision as well as strategy for driving the Fellowship under the current NEC was outlined. The tenure of this NEC ought to have ended by 8th August 2020. However, due to the ravaging effects of COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed on public gatherings in 2020, the National Conference did not hold at Onitsha as scheduled and by extension, the AGM as well as the election did not hold. By a resolution of the President-In-Council (PIC) on 18/07/2020 and based on the advice of the Board of Trustees by a letter dated 18th June 2020, the tenure of NEC was extended by one year from August 2020 to August 2021. The 1-year extension was a very challenging and difficult decision for NEC. A member of NEC indeed stepped down on 4th August 2020 in line with his three years constitutional mandate.

Within the period from August 2020 till date, we have had several virtual meetings on Zoom and a combination of physical and virtual meetings. By the grace of God, the first virtual technical Directorates session in the history of CLASFON took place from 6th to 8th August 2020 successfully to the glory of God. This National Conference is a combination of both physical and virtual meetings.

Part of the fall out of COVID-19 which substantially froze the activities of the Fellowship in 2020 has now brought about the need for a proposal for constitutional amendment to accommodate online elections in CLASFON in this AGM as advised by the BOT on the recommendation of the PIC. COVID-19 pandemic had a very negative effect on the activities of the Fellowship between 2020 and now. Regular Fellowship meetings were suspended for quite a while and that also negatively affected a number of our special programs and our finances. However, we had no record of any member that died from COVID-19 and a few members and relations of members infected by the virus, recovered to the glory of God.

Our activities at different levels have picked up well and this explains why we are here in this convocation. CLASFON has a good spread nation-wide with active presence in six (6) regions namely North West, North East, North Central, South West, South South and the South East with 54 Branches from 37 Branches in August 2019. From the student's angle, CLASFON has presence in the six Nigerian Law School Campus Fellowships with 56 Universities Chapters as at July 2021. The big question though is how many members do we have in CLASFON? Efforts made to collate membership data nationwide within the period under review has been quite unsuccessful.

3. BRANCHES AND DIRECTORATES

Our branches and directorates have continued to grow gradually with each Branch having its unique challenges and struggles. Without doubt, CLASFON activities are Branch based and I urge every member here present to participate actively at the level of the Branch Fellowships. We don't have "CLASFON National Branch" in CLASFON. So, do well to attend your Branch meetings regularly and pay your dues and march tithes through your Branches. Make your impact felt through your Branch and support the activities of the Branch as expected by the Branch Executive Committee.

Our Directorates represents the best channel for positively impacting our society at large. The nine Directorates have made their impact felt in various ways over the years but there is a lot more we can do. In the aspect of the protection of freedom of religion and belief, the abuse of human rights, the fight against corruption especially in the judiciary and the promotion of the rule of law and good governance, there is a lot of work to be done. The Directorates have a lot of work to do internally and externally and each member must be a part of this noble ideal by getting involved. The Directorates of CLASFON are now in their 12th year of existence since their inauguration by the 7th President (Dr. C.A.J. Chinwo) on 13/2/2009. The Directorates should have crossed from the age of infancy now to the adolescent years and are no longer expected to be crawling but to be up and about with bustling energy to do the work of our LORD and Master Jesus Christ.

4. PARTNERSHIPS AND AFFILIATIONS

a. Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP)

The partnership with the RLP is ongoing. The RLP Consultation scheduled for April 2020 in Kyiv, Ukraine did not hold due to COVID-19 pandemic. The shift to 2021 has been further rescheduled to 2022.

b. Advocates Africa (AA)

This is also an ongoing affiliation and with our Brother Sunny A. Akanni as the current President. The AA convocation fixed for Rwanda between 17th to 20th August 2021 is now going to hold virtually and not physically.

c. Advocates International (AI)

This is also an ongoing affiliation. Brother Brent McBurney stepped down recently as President of AI. We hope that with the appointment of Sister Teresa Conradié as President, things will change for the better.

d. Nigerian Bar Association (NBA)

CLASFON and NBA ought to be partners in progress and we seek to continually engage with the NBA at all levels and on our part to bring the light of Christ to bear in the legal profession in Nigeria based on our motto, "**A New Legal Profession Anchored on Christ**".

- e. Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)
CAN as the umbrella body for all the Churches embracing all Church denominations in Nigeria regards CLASFON very highly. Our legal knowledge and reach is of immense value and gives us a platform for supporting the Church in Nigeria. A number of legal interventions are required of us from time to time.
- f. Christian Solidarity Worldwide Nigeria (CSWN)
CSW is an organization primarily involved in advocacy and doing a lot of work on FORB globally, and in Nigeria especially Northern Nigeria through CSWN. CLASFON and CSWN entered into an MOU to partner together to advance FORB in Nigeria. A training sponsored by CSWN was organized for CLASFON members by between 12th to 15th July 2021 in furtherance of this MOU.

5. 2020/2021 ACTION PLAN

With the 1-year tenure extension, NEC/PIC approved a theme for 2021 which is "**Behold, Here I Stand**"- 1 Samuel 12:3. Key components of the ACTION PLAN among others includes the following —

- I. Acquisition of a landed property for CLASFON at Abuja.
- II. Production of 2021 and 2022 CLASFON Dairies.
- III. Getting the CLASFON National Prayer Team running as an intercessory arm of the Fellowship.
- IV. Dedication of a book on CLASFON history and presentation of a revised edition of Honorable Justice Niki Tobi's book on "The Christian Lawyer".
- V. Appointment of a new National Executive Director. Bro Ishaku Y. Daniel the immediate past NED exited in 2020 after 13 years working with CLASFON and was replaced by Bro. Osmond Eleojo Adejo.
- VI. Start an insurance policy for the Fellowship centrally;
- VII. Automate CLASFON activities at Branch levels;
- VIII. Start a mentorship program for young lawyers;
- IX. Not to leave an empty treasury for the next NEC to inherit.

We saw the hand of God in helping us to achieve some of the above goals while others are still very much on the drawing board awaiting implementation.

6. FINANCE

The presentation of the external auditors' report for the period between August 2019 to July 2021 gives a clue as to the actual state of our finances. We have work to do.

7. CHALLENGES

CLASFON faces a number of challenges including the following:-

- a. Lack of commitment by many members to the pursuit of the vision and mission of CLASFON even at the level of leadership.

- b. Poor funding and financial constraints as barriers to the attainment of some of our collective aspirations.
- c. High level of insecurity and economic instability that has negatively impacted the well-being and income of lawyers and has negatively affected the level of their participation in many CLASFON activities.
- d. Inability to adequately respond to the clarion calls by Churchesto issues requiring CLASFON interventions.

8. THE CHARGE

The CLASFON theme for 2021 is “Behold, Here I Stand! 1 Samuel 12:3. Like Samuel, CLASFON stands on the pedestal as an organization to say, “Behold, Here I stand,” after 40 years of service to God and humanity. Like Samuel, do we have a clean sheet? What exactly is our scorecard as a Christian NGO? Looking ahead to the next 40 years, where will CLASFON be in the pursuit of its vision and mission and our cherished core Biblical values? Will we remain committed to the vision and foundation laid by our founding fathers? We have a golden opportunity to evaluate our contributions so far and to chart a way forward. I congratulate every member of our great Fellowship that has made it to this special National Conference to commemorate our 40th anniversary. We each have a golden opportunity as leaders in our own right to ask yourself the questions Samuel asked the people, namely:

- ✓ Whose ox donkey have I stolen?
- ✓ Have I ever cheated any of you?
- ✓ Have I ever oppressed you?
- ✓ Have I ever taken a bribe?

Give the verdict yourself and if need be, make restitution by making right whatever you have done wrong. In this way, this conference will make a true meaning in our lives.

9. CONCLUSION

We give glory to God who works in us and by whose grace we are able both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). We appreciate the support of members which enabled us to come this far in doing the Master’s work in CLASFON for the period under review. Kindly extend the same support and much more to the incoming NEC please.

Thank you and God bless you. Amen

Arome M. Okwori Esq.
 President CLASFON
 2017-2021.