

LAW PERSONALITY

The Lagos judiciary was thrown into mourning last Tuesday with the death of the secretary of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Lagos Branch, Mr. Tola Apata. Lawyers have since been paying tribute to their departed colleague, who they loved so much, writes JOHN AUSTINUNNACHUKWU

Lawyers mourn ex-NBA secretary Apata

LAWYERS have been flocking the home of Secretary of Lagos Branch of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), the late Mr Babatola Apata to condole with his family. Apata died a few days after a motor crash on his way to Ado Ekiti for the National Executive Council (NEC) meeting of NBA.

He died last Tuesday following his discharge from hospital.

In his tribute, Chairman, Lagos branch, Mr. Alex Muoka said: "It is often said that death is unexpected, truly the passing on of Babatola Apata, Secretary of the foremost branch of the NBA was as sudden as it was unanticipated.

"Babatola was injured in an auto accident about 10 days before his demise. The accident was bad, but his injuries in comparison were minor - a fractured left foot and sprained right wrist. He had been treated, his foot was in POP, he had been discharged and was recovering well at home. So well that he was back to his usual ebullience and itching to return to work. The cast and crutches were a distraction he did not want.

"At home on Tuesday night, he complained of difficulty in breathing and then slumped. He was rushed to hospital but died on the way in the arms of his darling wife. When I saw his still body that night at LASUTH I could not accept it. The big lumbering frame that was so full of life laid out prostrate and lifeless! O death...

"Babatola will be sorely missed by his dear wife Deola. His siblings, who looked up to him will miss him. G.Elias & Co where he was a valued Associate will miss him. The judges before whom he appeared regularly will miss him. Lawyers will miss him. And the NBA Lagos Branch where he was building a reputation as a fine Secretary will surely miss him.

"Adieu Babatola. You have run your course here. It appears that you were called early to record the minutes of the meetings over there...We will mourn you. And we will treasure your memory."

In his tribute, the Chairman NBA Ado-Ekiti branch, Mr. J. O. Adewumi said: "Although my personal acquaintance with you was very short; nonetheless, you left a lasting impression on me, as you must have done to countless of others who knew you, as a highly cerebral and promising gem. Your contributions at the few meetings of the Egbe Amofin Odu'a where I had opportunity to watch and interact with you gave eloquent testimony to that conclusion.

"In any case, the fact that you won an elective post as the erstwhile secretary of one of the very critical, vibrant and popular branches of the Nigerian Bar Association, that is, the Lagos Branch, had removed any doubt, if any ever existed, as to your political dexterity and upcoming higher leadership traits. Dear Late Tola Apata, Esq., I must say that we in the Egbe Amofin Odu'a will greatly miss your wonderful contributions and unrelenting efforts at rebuilding the Egbe, our Legal Forum - on the part of popular democracy and justice.

"I, however, earnestly believe and pray that your contributions in that regard will not be in vain. How great the Egbe, by your untimely and painful demise, has lost your contributions toward that great and urgent task!! However, I take solace in that biblical and time-honored phrase: "... the LORD gave, and the LORD had taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD". (Job 1:21). Adieu my learned friend, as you rest

in the bosom of your creator"

Chairman NBA Ilesha branch, Mr. Oluwaseun Ajoba in his tribute said: "I had to put calls through to my members in Ilesha that one of our colleagues was involved in an accident in our territorial jurisdiction, upon being so informed. Colleagues rallied round at Mosaic Hospital. While NEC meeting was on in Ado-Ekiti, words came from them to me that all was well and this was passed to all that were panicking and soothed us.

Unfortunately, the unexpected filtered in of the death of a hitherto well man. O death you have done your worse! But, we rejoice that as we say goodbye to this Tola, he is being welcomed home somewhere. So death, you have lost the battle as you are not the end. Adieu Babatola Akpata! Colleagues in Lagos branch our condolences."

Chairman NBA Ikeja branch, Monday Ubani in his tribute said: "The news hit me with a devastating blow that Tola Apata is dead! It is a lie, I retorted. My informant, a colleague insisted on the veracity of his information as he got it from a reliable source, the chairman of Lagos Branch. "What"! I finally exclaimed when it became obvious that I was not dreaming. Indeed life is like a flower, it blossoms in the morning and fades away in the evening.

"In protest I conjured his face and placed it right before me in my mind's eye and started to remember personal encounters I had had with this amiable, ever smiling friend. The last encounter was at the Bench and Bar Forum presided over by Hon. Justice Ayo Philips, the Chief Judge of Lagos State. Tola made very useful contributions courteously and in his usual manner he was profound and insistent on some of the ideas he proffered. Some of those ideas were taken.

"Why this death is very painful is the fact that I am told and I verily believe my source that Tola's doctor had examined him and pronounced him alright, in other words that he did not sustain external or internal injury from the accident he had while traveling to Ado Ekiti for the last NBA NEC Meeting. Was the doctor correct in this deadly diagnosis? From this sudden death, it is obvious that he was not correct.. That again speaks volumes on the state of our health infrastructure in Nigeria.

"Adieu! my brother Tola. Life is a stage and we are the actors, evidentially you have played

your own part and the verdict is that you acted your part very well. On behalf of Ikeja Branch executive and members I console the wife, children and entire family of the Apatas and pray for the fortitude to bear this irreparable loss. I also extend our condolences to the executive and members of the Premier Branch for this loss. We share your grief and pray for strength in this hour of need. To all, let us all remember that death is inevitable. What matters is what we shall be remembered for when we exit this world. Tola be rest assured that we shall all meet again! Rest in Perfect Peace"

Former Assistant National Publicity Secretary NBA, Mr. Ike Uko said: "It was on Wednesday, March 19, 2014 on my way from the National Industrial Court, Ikoyi to the High Court Lagos, that I got alert on my phone. When I parked, I check my phone and saw the bad news from the Chairman of Nigerian Bar Association, Lagos branch, that our branch that Secretary, Babatola Apata, passed on the previous night. I could not believe it and I headed straight to the branch secretariat on the ground floor of the High Court building. On my way, I was stopped by a Security officer of the High Court, an acquaintance, who bellowed "former secretary, Nigeria Bar Association, Lagos branch secretary is dead" I became more confused and anxious.

"On my way to the secretariat, I ran into the office clerk, Alex, and asked him what happened. He confirmed the bad news. Babatola Apata was gone. He was involved in a car crash earlier in the month on his way to Ado-Ekiti to represent the branch at the National Executive Council Meeting of the Nigerian Bar Association that held between March 5-7, 2014.

"The location was Ijebu-Ijesha in Osun State. He was admitted to a hospital there. For better medical attention, he was transferred to Lagos-Centre of Excellence. He was improving. He was going for check ups from home. But on the faithful day, he gave up the ghost. No man can avoid fate. There, lay the fallen soldier, our branch secretary. A consummate bar man. Like his name, Apata, he was a human Iroko. He stood over six feet and weighed over a hundred kilograms. May be a younger version of my self. His minutes excited me to no end. Robust in content and style. I can't imagine a better scribe. Now he's no more. Oh! Death, why take him away so soon? Our branch needs him. His wife needs him more and the family yearns for him most.

"I wish the issue of his death is a matter of law alone. His Lagos branch has over 100 Senior Advocates to stand in for him *probono* to the highest court of the land. If it's about number, Lagos branch has the numerical strength to sway the vote his way. If it's about seniority one of our own is the oldest lawyer on roll having been enrolled in 1950 with 64 years post call experience!

"Babatola, rest in peace. We mourn you, but celebrate your excellence even while the candle burned so briefly. At the University of Ilorin, you topped your law class. Law School was also excellent. And barley 10 years post-call, you became branch secretary of the premier branch secretary of the premier branch. We imagine the height you would have reached if..."

For the immediate past chairman of Lagos branch and a very close friend of Tola Apata, Mr. Taiwo O. Taiwo: "To say that I was shocked



• Late Apata