

PRESS RELEASE

LET JUSTICE HAVE A HOME

A Call for the Completion of Igbosere Court Complex and the Rehabilitation of Court Facilities in Lagos State

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The state of court infrastructure in Lagos State, and the prolonged reconstruction of the Igbosere Court Complex in particular, demand urgent attention. The issue goes beyond a building project: it bears directly on the dignity, efficiency and accessibility of the administration of justice.

Courts are not ordinary government offices. They are the places where liberty is determined, property rights are adjudicated, contracts are enforced, families are protected, criminal responsibility is determined, and disputes between citizens, institutions and government are resolved.

The physical environment in which these constitutional responsibilities are discharged must therefore reflect the dignity and importance of the judicial function. Yet across Lagos State, some court facilities require substantial rehabilitation and modernisation, with concerns in areas such as ventilation and air-conditioning, sanitation, electricity, elevators, seating and waiting areas, security, accessibility for persons living with disabilities, parking and other basic facilities.

These are not merely questions of comfort. They concern judges, magistrates, lawyers, court staff, litigants, witnesses and members of the public who depend on the courts. At its core, the issue is about the dignity of the institution itself.

THE DIGNITY OF THE JUDICIAL OFFICE

Judges occupy a unique position in our constitutional democracy. They are entrusted with determining disputes that may affect the liberty, property and fundamental rights of citizens. The importance of that responsibility should be matched by a working environment that provides the basic facilities required for the proper discharge of judicial functions.

Judges should not be required to administer justice in conditions that would be considered unacceptable for other important institutions of government. This is not a criticism of the courts or of the judges who serve in them. On the contrary, it is an argument for judicial independence.

The separation of powers requires that the Judiciary be free to determine cases without interference from the Executive or Legislature. Judicial independence should not, however, mean that the Judiciary must struggle for the physical infrastructure required to perform its constitutional functions.

Section 121 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) provides the relevant framework for state finances and judicial funding. There is a clear distinction between providing and appropriating public resources for government infrastructure and interfering with the independent exercise of judicial power. We expect the Executive to respect the latter and equally to discharge the former.

IGBOSERE: SIX YEARS IS LONG ENOUGH

The urgency of the issue is especially clear in the case of Igbosere. The historic Igbosere High Court Complex was destroyed during the disturbances of October 2020.

In 2021, the Lagos State Government established a temporary court facility at Osborne as an interim response, pending the rebuilding of Igboere as a modern courthouse. That temporary solution was welcome, but temporary arrangements are supposed to be temporary.

Permanent reconstruction subsequently commenced, with Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu performing the groundbreaking ceremony on 12 December 2022. The project was conceived as a comprehensive redevelopment of the old complex, including restoration of the colonial-era structure and construction of a modern multi-storey facility, increasing the number of courts from 22 to 38, with additional judges' offices, parking, a 700-seat auditorium and other modern amenities.

We acknowledge that this is a substantial project. We also recognise that work has been undertaken. According to records from the Rebuild Lagos Trust Fund, construction has included foundation works, the basement, ground-floor slab and columns, with progress also recorded on the first-floor slab.

The question, therefore, is not whether any work has been done. The question is when the people of Lagos will receive the completed court complex. As we approach the sixth anniversary of the destruction of the original complex, that question can no longer be avoided.

HOW LONG SHOULD A TEMPORARY COURT REMAIN TEMPORARY?

The Osborne facility was established quickly in response to an exceptional situation. Six years after Igboere was destroyed, and nearly four years after permanent reconstruction commenced, the legal community and the public are entitled to ask:

- What is the present status of the project?
- What remains outstanding?
- What is the current funding position?
- What are the contractual and administrative challenges, if any?
- What is the realistic completion date?

CAN THE GOVERNMENT COMMIT TO COMPLETING AND COMMISSIONING IGBOERE BEFORE MAY 2027?

Governor Sanwo-Olu's tenure ends in May 2027. That creates a clear timeframe within which this important project can be completed. We urge the Governor to make the completion of the Igboere Court Complex a priority of the remainder of his administration and a lasting part of its legacy.

“We are not asking for another groundbreaking ceremony. We are not asking for another announcement. We are asking for completion and commissioning.”

WOULD AN EXECUTIVE PROJECT BE ALLOWED TO WAIT THIS LONG?

If a major infrastructure project principally serving the Executive arm of government had been formally commenced in December 2022, would the Government regard it as satisfactory for the project still to be awaiting completion nearly four years later?

This is not intended to understate the complexity of public construction projects or to create a false comparison between different forms of infrastructure. It is intended to make one simple point: justice infrastructure should not be treated as a lower-order government priority.

The Judiciary is not an adjunct of the Executive. It is a separate and constitutionally independent arm of government. A government that expects its courts to determine cases efficiently must provide an environment in which judges, magistrates, lawyers and court personnel can perform their respective functions with dignity.

THE ISSUE IS BIGGER THAN IGBOSERE

While Igbosere is the most visible symbol of the problem, the issue extends beyond one building. Lagos requires a comprehensive and sustainable Justice Infrastructure Programme covering all parts of the State. Such a programme should include:

- Building new courtrooms in areas where existing space is inadequate;
- Rehabilitation of dilapidated court buildings;
- Adequate Judges' and Magistrates' chambers;
- Modern registries and filing facilities;
- Reliable electricity and water supply;
- Adequate parking and access roads;
- Appropriate security and fire-safety systems;
- Facilities accessible to persons living with disabilities;
- Modern ICT infrastructure;
- Electronic recording and case-management systems;
- Adequate facilities for lawyers, litigants and witnesses; and
- A structured maintenance programme for completed court facilities.

This should not be approached merely as a collection of individual construction projects. It should form part of a long-term justice-sector infrastructure policy for Lagos State.

IT IS NOT JUST ABOUT THE MONEY - DELIVERY MATTERS TOO

We acknowledge that the Government has continued to invest in systems and facilities that support the administration of justice. The Lagos State 2026 budget contains substantial provisions for justice-related infrastructure, including the construction and completion of court facilities, ICT infrastructure, digitalisation and other court-related projects.

The State Government has also announced that several justice-sector projects have been completed or brought into operation, including the renovated J.I.C. Taylor Courthouse and the new Commercial Court in Tapa, while work continues on other court buildings. These developments are welcome and should be acknowledged.

The real test of a budget, however, is not simply what is allocated. It is what is delivered. The people of Lagos should be able to see completed, functional and properly maintained infrastructure arising from the resources appropriated for the justice sector.

OUR CALL TO GOVERNOR SANWO-OLU

We respectfully call on Governor Babajide Olusola Sanwo-Olu and the Lagos State Government to take the following steps:

1. COMPLETE IGBOSERE BEFORE MAY 2027

Commit to completing and commissioning the Igbosere Court Complex before the expiration of the Governor's tenure in May 2027.

2. PUBLISH A COMPLETION ROADMAP

Make available a clear and realistic programme identifying outstanding works, implementation stages and expected completion dates.

3. ACCOUNT FOR THE PROJECT

Provide periodic public information on the status of the project, including funding, outstanding contractual obligations and implementation challenges.

4. UNDERTAKE A STATEWIDE COURT INFRASTRUCTURE AUDIT

Assess every court facility in Lagos State and categorise facilities according to those requiring immediate rehabilitation, substantial reconstruction or complete replacement.

5. ESTABLISH A SUSTAINABLE JUSTICE-INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMME

Incorporate court infrastructure into a long-term programme capable of surviving individual projects and administrations.

6. RESTORE DIGNITY TO THE COURT ENVIRONMENT

Ensure that the working environment of Judges, Magistrates, lawyers and court staff meets reasonable standards consistent with the importance of the judicial function.

A LEGACY THAT SHOULD OUTLIVE AN ADMINISTRATION

The current administration can still make a lasting impact on the justice system in Lagos by completing the Igboere project. Its completion would be a significant contribution to the State's judicial infrastructure and a legacy capable of outliving any single administration.

The significance of Igboere goes beyond bricks, concrete and steel. It is part of the history of Lagos and of the Nigerian Judiciary. Its restoration would demonstrate that the State understands that justice requires not only laws, judges and courtrooms, but institutions and infrastructure capable of supporting the administration of justice.

Six years after the destruction of the original complex, the time for indefinite waiting should be over. The legal profession and the public should not have to ask the same question again in 2027: Will Igboere be completed?

The answer should be clear: Yes. The proof must be shown through action - by having a fully built and operational Court Complex ready before the Governor's term ends in May 2027.

**LET JUSTICE HAVE A HOME.
LET IGBOERE RISE AGAIN.
LET IT BE COMPLETED.**

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