



# CHAPTER NINE



# ADMINISTRATION



## COURT OF APPEAL HEADQUARTERS

The Court of Appeal started from a small building at 1 Bourdillon Road, Ikorodu Lagos. The house belonged to a minister in the First Republic. When the military took over government on January 15, 1966, the minister was sent home. In 1976 when the Court of Appeal came into being, the property was found to be a suitable location. The building now houses the Federal High Court Lagos. Later, the Court moved to the former building used by the Supreme Court near Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos.

In December 1996, the headquarters of the Court of Appeal moved from Lagos Nigeria's former capital to the new capital and seat of power Abuja. At the headquarters is the office of the President who is head of the Court. There is equally the office of the Chief Registrar, the Chief Accounting Officer of the Court. He reports directly to the President. There are heads of the various departments - Finance and Accounts Administration, Supply, Library and Audit, which report directly to the Chief Registrar.

In each division, there is a Presiding Justice who is in charge of the day-to-day management of the division. The Presiding Justice (PJ) reports directly to the President of the Court. Each division has a minimum of five justices including the PJ. There is a Deputy Chief Registrar (DCR) who is the Head of Administration of each division of the Court. He also serves as the Accounting Officer. Other units in a division are Registry, charged with the responsibility of filing papers relating to Appeals or other matters that require the determination of the Court, Administration, Finance and Library. These sections are headed by senior officers who report to the DCR of the division. The DCR in turn reports to the Presiding Justice and keeps him informed on the activities of the division.

### OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

In more than three decades since the Court of Appeal was established, the responsibilities of the office of the President of the Court have increased. The President is required to discharge the duties of the office and preserve, protect, and defend the Rule of Law in Nigeria. Some key qualities for the office include vision, pragmatism, charisma, consensus building, credibility and administrative skills.

The office of the President of the Court of Appeal is honourable and exciting yet herculean one. He is the chief administrator of the Court. There are currently five divisions under him, with growing demands from other places for more.

The President attends to the needs of Justices in the divisions and ensures that the Court is living up to expectations. Apart from administrative work, he also presides in Court. A typical sitting in one day has a voluminous stack of appeal files. The Court sits five days in a week, so by the end of the week, they may end up taking about thirty-five appeals. After the files have been collected, the President spends quality time with the panel to discuss the appeals. It is at that time that they decide on the appeals that will be allowed or dismissed. Abdullahi, former president of the Court said there were days when o



three Justices were on the panel. At such times, he got about three or four volumes of files from which he had to write the judgment.

The other two Justices shared one or two. He usually took more and gave other Justices less because they already would have accumulated some other appeals during the week. Abdullahi said:

*“It is a very challenging job, though exciting and interesting. This is the only way one can keep his law alive. Administration in every way is appraising the law. When you sit in Court, you come across new views, new ideas, particularly good lawyers that will often challenge you. You really become alive! I enjoyed it.”<sup>1</sup>*

The most challenging time, happily, does not happen everyday. It is during the elections tribunals the President works hardest because he is saddled with the responsibility of establishing and supervising the election tribunals and assigning the Judges. In many cases he is dealing with Judges he does not know. He gives them their assignments, posts them out, and then, hope for the best from the election petition tribunals on which they sit. Hon. Justice Abdullahi explained it this way:

*“When we ask for nomination from the states, they send names of judges, but for the last elections, I did not accept just the nominations. After I received the names, I compiled the list for each state and sent it back to the Nigerian Bar Association branch of that state to comment on the judges; their character, industry and knowledge of the law. This was because they were better acquainted with the judges than myself. As a result of that, I received a lot of cooperation from the members of the bar and I must thank them for that. They were very frank and honest. I ended up selecting the best judges and transferred them into various tribunals all over the country. That was also a very difficult thing because, you cannot simply post two judges from one state on one tribunal. You have to pick a judge from Lagos and probably take him to Maiduguri, take one from Maiduguri to Edo, take the one from Edo to Akwa-Ibom, and so on. That way, you can ensure no undue influence is exerted in the process.”<sup>2</sup>*

## OFFICE OF THE CHIEF REGISTRAR

The office of the Chief Registrar (CR) of the Court of Appeal ensures the day-to-day running of the Court. He/she oversees the general administration of the staff, that is the non-judicial officers, who are the backbone of the Court. The CR is also the Chief Accounting Officer of the Court of Appeal and reports directly to the President. Always in contact with the Deputy Chief Registrars (DCRs) in all divisions spread across the country, the CR's office coordinates the Court's operations.

As the Chief Accounting Officer of the Court, he/she keeps the seal of the Court on

behalf of the President. He/she is the custodian of all the Court books and records that either the Court of Appeal Act or Rules of Court enjoins him to keep. In addition to being the Accounting Officer, issues relating to appointments, discipline, disbursement of funds, proper maintenance of vehicles, maintenance of quarters, maintenance of infrastructure, are the jobs that he is empowered to do and oversee. The CR has to deal with so many Justices with diverse individual needs and mannerisms.

Apart from the Justices, the CR also caters for the staff. He/she carries them along to make sure that they gave their utmost in service. As CR, he/she musters up a lot of activity in the Court to make sure that staff welfare is paramount.

Some CRs to become Judges. Talking on the difference between the office of a Chief Registrar and that of a Judge, a former CR of the Court now a Justice of the Court of Appeal, Hon. Justice Uzo Ndukwe-Anyanwu, explained that the difference between a CR and a Judge is that a CR is in charge of the administration of the entire Court. When one becomes a judge, he/she only has about ten or thirteen staff to manage and administration is whittled down unlike a CR that has about 1000 or 2000 staff including the justices. Ndukwe- Anyanwu said:

*“As a judge, I just had my own small number of staff, about thirteen of them in the High Court. In the Court of Appeal, it’s even smaller. I have my two secretaries, a clerk, a messenger and that’s it. You do more of administration when you are a Chief Registrar than any other thing. When you become a judge, you drop all the administration and then deal with issues as they come. You just deal with cases and that is it.”*

As each CR began his/her tenure, focus was given to specific areas calling for attention. Hon. Justice Sadiq Umar, a former CR and now a judge of the High Court of the FCT explained that he focused on two key areas: staff training and welfare.

He said that when he came in as a CR in 2002, he realised that the staff were lacking in the area of training. Consequently, he made it one of his cardinal objectives and ensured that they were well trained because without training, productivity would be minimal. He made sure that every staff had an opportunity of attending a training session at least once in a year. Funds were made available for members of staff to benefit from a sort of continuous education. The issue of staff welfare was equally an area that attention was given. Medical expenses were taken care of and the staff got what was due them. The Court has provided a crèche for the convenience of nursing mothers so that they are not left out.

In the area of Court funding, Justice Umar expressed gratitude to the civilian government. Though they had to go to the National Assembly to ask for money and faced the challenges of lobbying, it was far better than the military regime. They had the support of the Committee on Judiciary in the House of Representatives and managed to get substantial funds to cater for the Court at that time. They also tried as much as possible

to make sure that whatever funding made available, was justifiable. He said:

*"Honestly, we didn't have much problems from the National Assembly. They were very, very supportive. The Obasanjo administration usually would release funds when due unlike some others. Hence we didn't have the problem of disbursing funds."*<sup>4</sup>

A common test faced by CRs is the coordination of activities at the headquarters where he/she serves as the Chief Administrative Officer, as well as supervising activities in several divisions scattered across the country. He/she is expected to be abreast of happenings and act accordingly. Though the divisions have Deputy Chief Registrars, the responsibilities lie with the Chief Registrar. He/She makes certain that things work because everything is centered around administration, and the administration is based in Abuja. He has to make the work of the Justices comfortable. This responsibility is immense as there are over fifty Justices of the Court. Umar noted that the CR is just like a wife of so many. The Justices are the husbands. He has to be careful in attending to them, giving attention to individual needs.

*"I didn't know until I became a judge; now I realize that judges have their own peculiar way of doing things. They are perfectionists. They are not difficult if you understand them. Yet, it is a big task for a CR who attends to over 50 of these justices and a staff strength of close to 2000 spread all over the country."*<sup>5</sup>

## **INTEGRATING RETIRED JUDGES AT THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF COURT OF APPEAL JUSTICES**

Hon. Justice Sadiq Umar initiated this idea while he was DCR at the Lagos division. He recounted that an idea occurred to him when retired Justices of the Court came to Lagos to pursue their pension. Some of them came with their wives and children. They would introduce themselves and mention when they had served in the Court. Umar was usually surprised because many of them were unknown to him. Some had retired before he came in as DCR. A number of these Justices were in a desperate financial situation. They would always ask about their former colleagues.

At a point he proposed the idea to Justice Oguntade, the Presiding Justice at that time. Umar suggested that it would be good to create an opportunity for these old Justices all over the country, to come together regularly so that there could be a union of old and serving Justices. They would also be able to relate with their former colleagues.

Noble as this ideal is, it is yet to be implemented. Funding might be part of why it has not taken off, though according to Umar, the Court's president at that time Hon. Justice Umaru Abdullahi bought the idea.

Notwithstanding, the court sponsors all their retired justices to Body of Benchers meetings. Retired justices of the Court are Life Benchers. Their transportation, accommodation and other logistics are financed by the court.

**CHIEF REGISTRARS OF THE COURT OF APPEAL  
FROM 1976 TO DATE**

F. O. Awogu (Decd)	October, 1976 - December, 1977
T. A. Odunowo Esq.	December, 1977 - September, 1980
S. O. Ojitalayo Esq.	September, 1981 - November, 1986
Yusuf Ibrahim Esq.	November, 1986 - August, 1990
Abubakar A. Jega Esq.	March, 1991 - December, 1992
Ibrahim Moh'd Musa Sauluwa Esq.	December, 1992 - December, 1994
S. F. Ogunbodede Esq. (Decd)	December, 1994 - December, 1996
Uzo Ndukwe-Anyanwu Esq.	December, 1996 - December, 1998
Issac Iheozor Ejiofor Esq. (Decd)	October, 1998 - September, 2002
Abubakar Sadiq Umar Esq.	September, 2002 - December, 2003
Jamilu Yammama Tukur Esq.	December, 2003 - April, 2007
Bode Thomas Esq.	April, 2007 - December, 2008
Sunday Ajiboye Esq. (Decd)	December, 2008 - July, 2009
Aliyu Ibrahim Esq.	July, 2009 - Date



CHIEF REGISTRARS



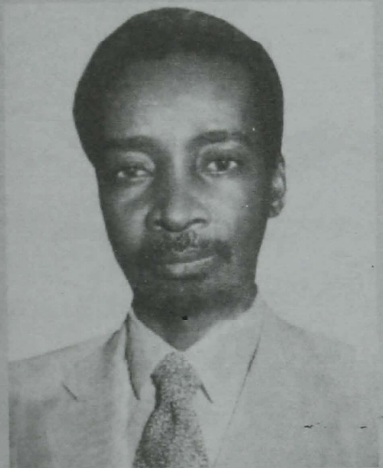
F. O. Awogu Esq  
Oct. 1976 - Dec. 1977 (Decd)



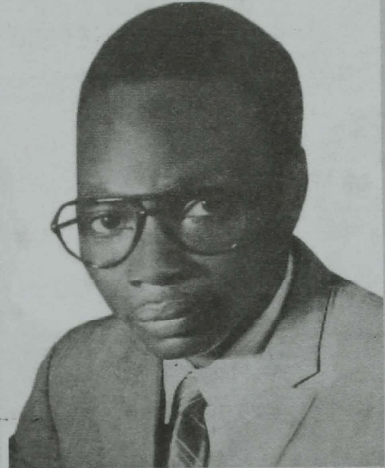
T. A. Odunowo Esq  
Dec. 1977 - Sept. 1981



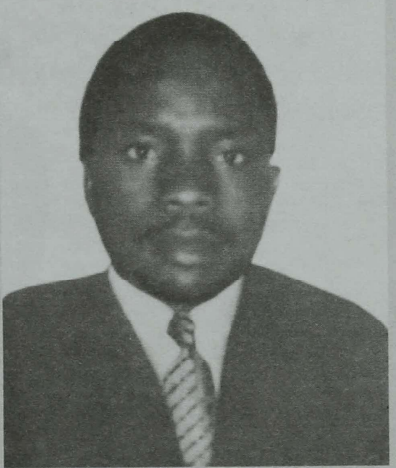
S. O. Ojitalayo Esq  
Sept. 1981 - Nov. 1986



Alh. Yusuf Ibrahim Esq  
Nov. 1986 - Aug. 1990



Abubakar A. Jega Esq  
Mar. 1991 - Dec. 1992



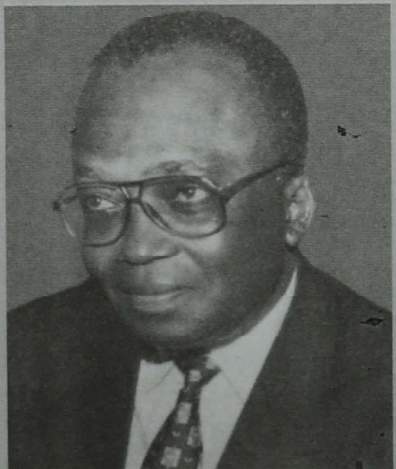
I. M. M. Saulawa Esq  
Dec. 1992 - Dec. 1994



S. F. Ogunbodede Esq  
Dec. 1996 (Decd)



Uzo Anyanwu Esq  
Dec. 1996 - Dec. 1998



Issac I. Ejiofor Esq  
Oct. 1998 - Sept. 2002 (Decd)

CHIEF REGISTRARS



Sadiq Umar Esq  
Sept. 2002 - Dec. 2003



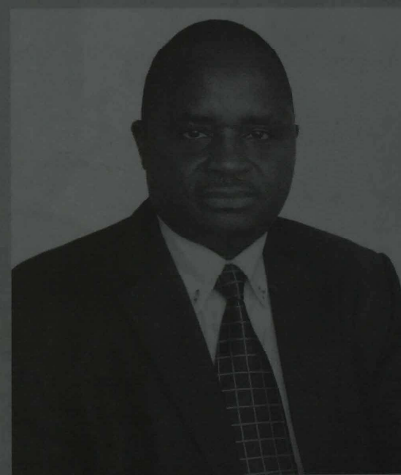
J. Y. Tukur Esq  
Dec. 2003 - April 2007



Bode Thomas Esq  
April 2007 - Dec. 2008



Sunday J. Ajiboye Esq  
Dec. 2008 - July 2009 (Decd)



Aliyu Ibrahim Esq  
July 2009 - Date

## DEPUTY CHIEF REGISTRAR

There is a DCR at the headquarters who serves as the Accounting Officer and reports to the CR. The office of the DCR at the headquarters was a novel idea. It was created in 2002, with Mr. M. S. Ishaq, now a judge of the Federal High Court, serving as the first.

The DCR has the opportunity of working closely with the Honourable President of the Court and with the Justices from various divisions. His job entails the general administration of the Court, welfare of Justices, and visiting some of the divisions whenever the President would preside over a matter in any of the divisions of the Court. The job is not different from that of the CR who is the Chief Administrative Officer of the Court but he serves as an assistant and does almost the same work with the Chief Registrar.

DCRs in the divisions take care of their own area. They are the Administrative Officers, apart from the Presiding Justice, who is the head of the division. The DCR in every division of the Court is charged with the responsibility of supervising Senior Officers in their departments. Each DCR reports directly to the Presiding Justice of the division. Aside from administrative work, DCRs in the divisions liaise with justices who deliver judgements and give orders. These have to be cross-checked by the DCR before the orders are served.

## OTHER DEPARTMENTS

Also located within the headquarters are the departments of Finance and Accounts, Administration and Supply, Library, Audit, the Federal Audit Unit, and the Transport Section that handles vehicles. These departments are headed by qualified and competent personnel who report directly to the Chief Registrar.

In the divisions, there are fewer number of these departments. Divisions do not necessarily have the Audit section because their vouchers are audited at the headquarters. They do not have a Federal Audit Unit except Federal Auditors raise questions on their operations when they check their books. There is a Library section, Transport section, office of the DCR who is the focal person in the division, Litigation section, Administration and Accounts. The Litigation section is absent at the headquarters although the CR could be regarded as the Chief Litigation Officer of the Court.

In the divisions however, the litigation section is the engine room of the Court. It is there processes are filed, appeals are entered, papers are prepared, services of processes are carried out. The Litigation Officers prepare the cases for hearing in the Court room. Presently, the Court has about 1,610 staff on its payroll, including the CR.

## THE HEADQUARTERS COMPLEX

The Court of Appeal has had great challenges ranging from election petitions, to funding, constitutional matters and more. But a major challenge stood out - the battle for its permanent site. Though this has been fought and won, it is a story worth telling.

Umaru Abdullahi, was there from the first time plans were made to build a befitting headquarters complex. He was the champion in making this complex a reality and he tells the story:

*The reason we are just getting a befitting headquarters complex could be the effect of the long military rule in this country. We can't forget that during the military administration, there was nobody asking what your allocation was, or someone helping to enforce money given for your allocation. Even at the federal level we were at the mercy of the President or Head of State. We had to go every time to beg for money. Whatever project we had was submitted to the Executive to verify or to vet and give what they felt like giving. This had a very telling effect on the development of the Judiciary generally and the Court of Appeal was not an exception.*

*In 1996, there was an All Nigerian Judges conference in Kano when Justice Akanbi was the President of the Court of Appeal. General Useni who was the Minister of FCT, sent some architects to Kano to discuss with us, the possibility of establishing the headquarters of the Court of Appeal in Abuja. The design they showed us was completely a misfit. It was not what the Court of Appeal required as they came up with some 28 Court halls in an eight story building. We took one look at the design and said no, this is not what the Court of Appeal requires. I remember Justice Akanbi called Justice Kalgo and I and asked us to have a look at the design. One look at it and we knew we didn't need twenty-eight Court halls in one place because we were to spread all over the country, with each division developing at its own pace. So, we told the architects that after our conference, we could further discuss what we really needed.*

*The headquarters of the Court moved from Lagos to Abuja in 1996. Justice Akanbi and I tried as much as possible to see the Minister so that we could revive the possibility of establishing the Court. We gave up after many unsuccessful attempts to see him. When Gado Nasko became the FCT Minister, we made an attempt to see him.*

*There was no success as he was very busy with the National Assembly building. Later on, Abba Gana came in and, we also tried to see him. He said he wanted to help, but there wasn't much he could do. We then decided*

*to forget about the matter. Later on, I felt that the place we were using as the headquarters was becoming choked and nobody was happy. I then decided that we had to do something about it again. We had started saving some money every year; we would apply for allocation and, the National Assembly would approve such amount of money to be used for the Court complex and, we'd keep it. So when we collected about three years allocation, I said it was time for me to start. With the help of the National Assembly, particularly Senator Mike Ajebo, we started the design. It got completed and the issue was to award contract. We didn't think the site would be a problem. When our team got to the location, they were chased away by some security guards and asked not to return. We asked why, as the land was ours. A lot of argument ensued and we were told that for security reasons, we could not build there. Security reasons? So Court of Appeal is going to be a security risk in this place? I mean look at the Police headquarters which is close by, they have a seven story building. They are the people with guns. What do we have in the Court of Appeal? Pens!*

*Anyway, the site issue kept on dragging. I was just about giving up when the President at the time, Chief Obasanjo heard about the matter and inquired what was going on. A meeting with him was fixed. We took the Abuja Master Plan with us as well as our design.*

*I went with a team of Judges and the Chief Registrar. When the meeting started, we spread out the Abuja Master Plan and pointed to the location with Court of Appeal written in black and white. He said, "but this your place." We replied that the location was ours but we were told we could not build there. He promised to look into the matter.*

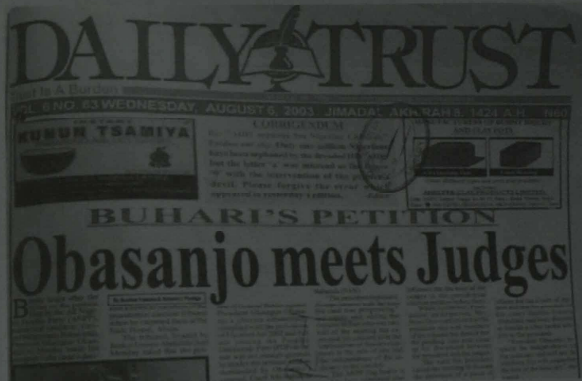
*In five minutes, the meeting was over. We were amazed to see a bold headline in Daily Trust newspaper the next day saying that all the Judges of the Court of Appeal and members of the tribunal had been summoned by Obasanjo to tell them what to do, how to decide the petition at the Court in his favour. It was very embarrassing, but we took it calmly. We knew what took us there and we also knew what we did. So there was no need to shout and tell them.*

*The Minister of the FCT, Nasir El-Rufai, strikingly at some point ended the drama. I don't know what he did eventually but one day, he came in to see me and said, 'you can now go ahead and build on your site.' I was surprised and very grateful. So that's how we ended that aspect of the problem.*

*The construction started but dragged on for a while because we had to comply with a lot of things. Initially it was a due process matter. We later*

*had a stroke of luck, the National Assembly relied on the separation of powers and authorized us to establish our own judiciary's due process. So things became much easier for us, and then the construction process started in earnest. This is where we are today. It is completed now. We thank God.<sup>6</sup>*

Finally, the Court took its rightful place in the FCT, Abuja. Commissioned by late President Umaru Musa 'Yar Adua, on December 15, 2008, the building today stands proudly adjacent to its contemporary, the Supreme Court.



One of the challenges during the planning of the new Headquarters complex was this misguided newspaper's headline. It said that a visit to former President Obasanjo by a team from the Court of Appeal, led by Hon. Justice Umaru Abdullahi, to discuss problems encountered at the Complex site, was political; that President Obasanjo was telling them how to decide the petition.

### Why We Met Obasanjo, By Appeal Court President

President, Court of Appeal, Justice Umaru Abdullahi, yesterday said that the visit of the Appeal Court justices to Aso Rock Villa was informed by the compelling need to find out from President

*From Lillian Okunwa in Abuja*

Obasanjo Obasanjo why the court was barred from developing the land allotted for construction of its permanent site.

Justice Abdullahi had in July attended a meeting with Obasanjo. A presiding judge of the Court of Appeal, the Registrar of the court and the architect handling the court building were also in attendance at the party.

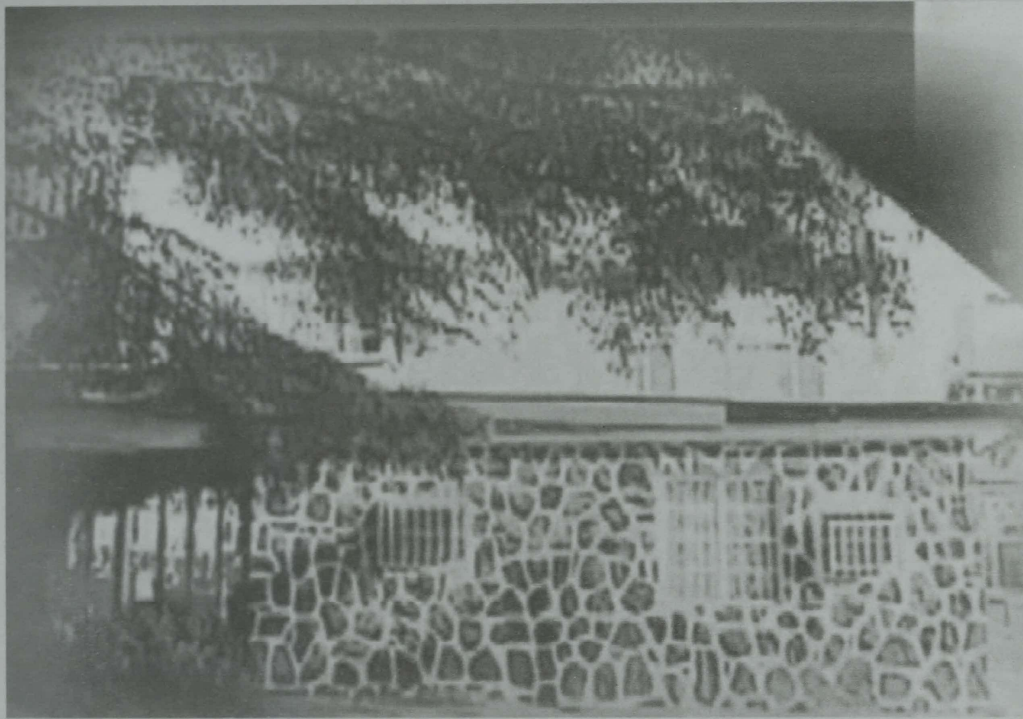
But criticism had trailed the meeting ostensibly because Justice Abdullahi is head of the panel of judges handling the petition filed by Major General Muhammadu Buhari of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) against the re-election of President Obasanjo.

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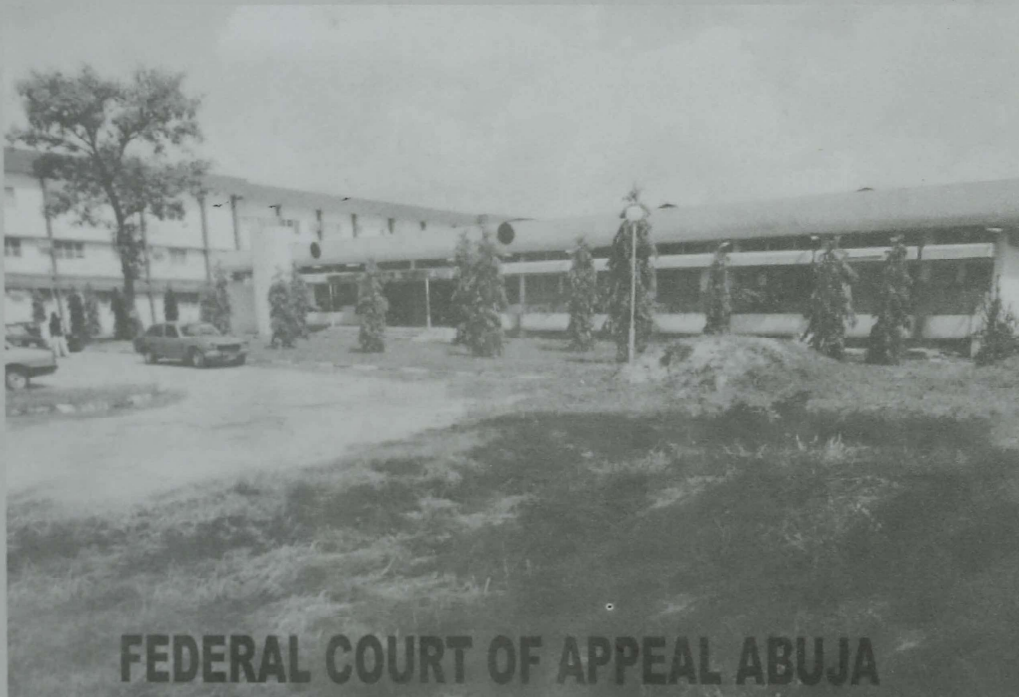
Tsi	
AGRICULTURE	+1.2% (N27,986-3,279)
MINING	+2.7% (N62,886-3,179)
MANUFACTURING	+0.9% (N43,996-2,279)
RETAIL	+1.8% (N86,886-2,179)
TOTAL	+2.0% (N201,886-2,979)
Top 100	
BY GREEN CO	-0.2% (N5,641-4,979)
CHARTERED	-0.1% (N3,286-4,979)
LEASING	-1.0% (N2,800-4,779)
FLORISTS	-0.9% (N1,285-2,679)
TRAVEL	-1.0% (N7,686-1,279)
Liquor	
Volume	10,700 million
Value	N271,274 million
Dist	2,127
*As at quarterly 25/08/2003	
Source: CBN	



### Former Court of Appeal Headquarters Building



First Court of Appeal building, 1 Bourdillon Street, Ikoyi - Lagos



**FEDERAL COURT OF APPEAL ABUJA**  
Former Court of Appeal Headquarters Building in Abuja





## Construction At The New Court Of Appeal Headquarters Complex, Abuja



Former President of The Court, Hon. Justice Umaru Abdullahi  
tours the site

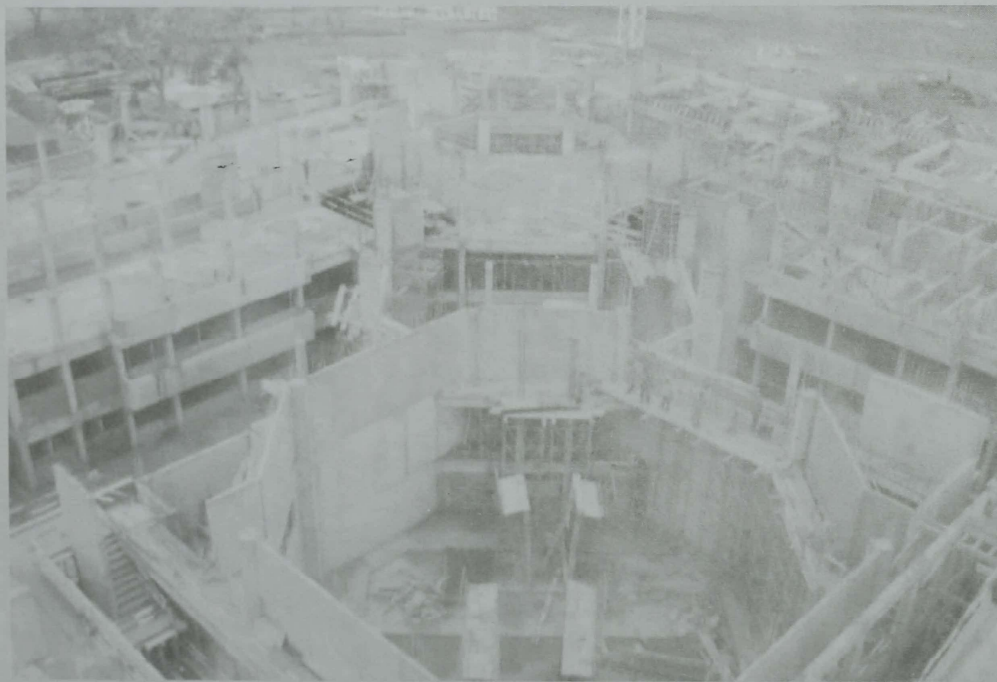




## Construction At The New Court Of Appeal Headquarters Complex, Abuja



Former President of The Court, Hon. Justice Umaru Abdullahi tours the site



Work in Progress



## Construction At The New Court Of Appeal Headquarters Complex, Abuja

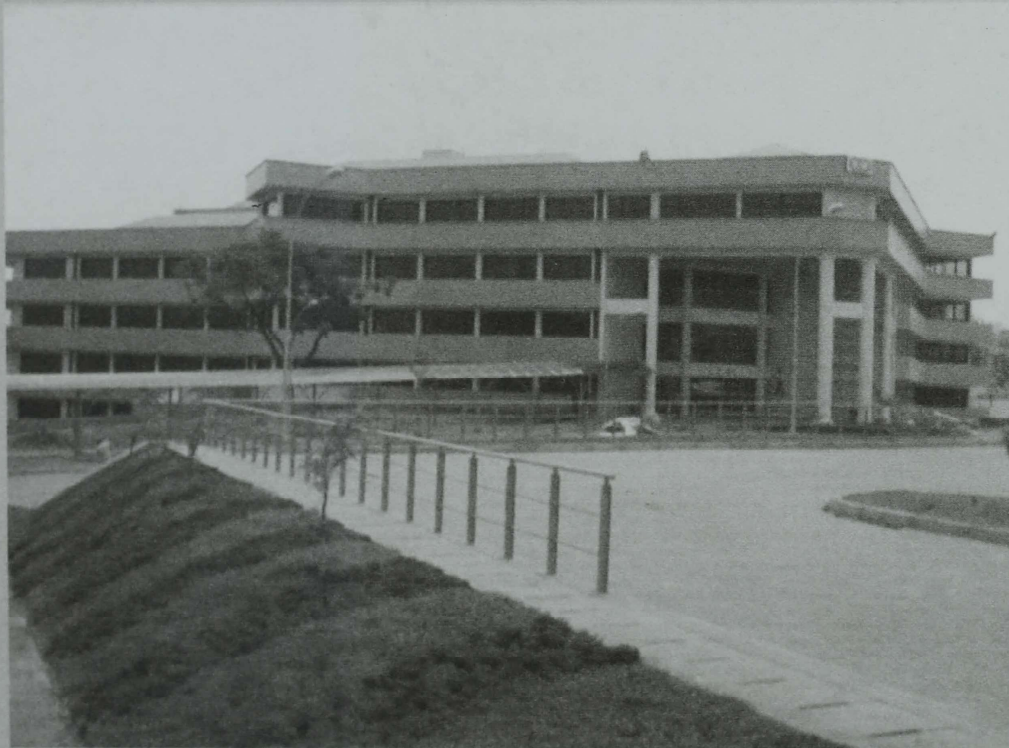


Work in Progress





### The New Court Complex





NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NIG.  
KOGI STATE BRANCH  
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