

**LSK President's Speech at the Annual Dinner & Dance on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2016 at the  
Intercontinental Hotel, Nairobi**

It is a matter of pride and a distinct privilege for me to be standing before you as the President of the Law Society of Kenya.

I signed the Roll of Advocates on the 18th December, 1989 and I was assigned P. 105 No. 1913/89. I became the 1,913th member of our society. Next week I shall have the honour of witnessing the entry of the latest additions to the profession when the next batch of young lawyers take the oath and sign the Roll. I understand they will be approximately 1500 in number and will be assigned numbers beginning from 14\*\*\* in number.

In just over 26 years the number of members of our society has swelled by over 12k. The transformation of our society is now long overdue. The current structure of governance has served the Society well but it was better suited to serve a much smaller number of members. It must now change not only to be more efficient for and responsive to a society that is substantially larger but also to involve a greater number of members in its activities and in the governance structure.

The blueprint for the necessary changes in structure is set out in the LSK Act, 2014 and in particular in Sections 24, 28 and 41 which provide for the devolution to the branches of practice and welfare matters, for the transformation of the secretariat and for the creation of regulations, respectively. I must commend the immediate past council and its predecessors for having produced this statute albeit there are certain aspects of it that are the subject of judicial scrutiny as to their constitutional suitability. The Act sets out how governance of the Society can and should involve many more advocates. We should all become involved and invested in improving and strengthening our Society.

This office therefore comes with the grave responsibility of ushering in this transformation within the shortest possible period to enable the Society to be a dynamic, efficient and responsive professional body able to meet the challenges of nationhood that it must in the discharge of its mandate.

The LSK has experienced a tumultuous past year where considerable acrimony between members played out in public. This acrimony and division extended into the elections which were vigorously contested. The conclusion of the election now provides the Society with an opportunity to look beyond this period and focus on how to heal the divisions within the membership. I continue to have the greatest respect for my competitors in the contest and indeed for all who participated in the elections. I thank all those who voted for me and to those who did not I shall work for you just as hard.

We have a diverse membership rich in talent and ability. The apparent distance between old and young counsel is a matter of concern to me, because I think it is unnecessary. And as an older counsel I feel the responsibility lies more upon me to reach out to my younger colleagues.

My council shall lead this process of healing and inclusivity. We intend to meet with the senior council committee, branch chairmen and officials and various groups of young advocates. The LSK is our society. Only we can make it work for us and for the greater society.

The bar and the bench are always partners in the administration of justice. Members of the judiciary all commence their legal careers as members of the LSK. Our society remains the recruitment pool for the judiciary. We receive into our ranks judicial officers who return to practice at the conclusion of their tours. We are family. We share a common oath. The crisis of confidence in the judiciary precipitated by allegations of corruption is therefore of great concern to the LSK. It is in our interest to do whatever we can to address this situation and I am conscious of the very limited time before the general elections of 2017 tests the institution of the judiciary. We intend to meet with the Hon CJ and the CRJ for discussions on how confidence can be restored in this important institution as fast as possible.

We are conscious that we assume office as the scourge of corruption plagues our nation. It is endemic and has infected practically all aspects of our lives. Declarations of zero tolerance are woefully inadequate. A holistic approach to dealing with this scourge. And Kenyans should ask themselves, "what society do we really want?" The Asian tigers economy nations serve to remind us just how far we could have gotten were it not for corruption. Closer home a smaller East African neighbour advances in leaps and strides without the weight of corruption holding it back.

A culture of intolerance of corruption is what this country requires. We saw a brief glimpse of that in the first weeks following the elections of 2002. Our public officers managing/controlling our greatest and most valuable resources on behalf of citizens must embrace completely Chapter VI of our constitution; even if, in the words of a friend, it feels like hugging a cactus. Simply completing wealth declaration forms and obtaining certificates of good conduct is not enough. And to questions of integrity that may arise, by all means proclaim innocence but then act consistently with that claim by submitting to the scrutiny of investigation. Cooperate fully. Desist from the "I am, my people are, being finished". Where there are imputations of impropriety desist from declarations of "I would rather die" or "over my dead body". There is honour in taking responsibility. By all means fall on your sword.

The process of investigating and prosecuting corruption cases must also inspire confidence that the actual perpetrators are being apprehended, tried and convicted. Kenyans despair at the usual merry-go-round of legal objections and constitutional challenges.

We are aware we have come into office at a critical time with many challenges facing the country. I would like to assure the public and the members of the Society that once we emerge united, reorganised and efficient the LSK shall be up to the task in meeting each of these challenges and fully discharging it's mandate to uphold the constitution and protect the rule of law and the administration of justice

**Mr. Isaac Okero,  
LSK President.**