

# **NIGERIA: THE UNFINISHED FEDERAL PROJECT**

**By Professor I.E. Sagay, SAN.**

The Idigbe Lecture series was established by Chief Gani Fawehinmi, the great crusader for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, by a letter dated 11<sup>th</sup> June 1984, written to me as Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Benin. His reasons for establishing the lecture and a prize for the best graduating student every year, is contained in this letter, which I now quote.

“I established Idigbe Memorial Lectures to immortalize the name of one of the most unique Judges of all times. IDIGBE stands out in Nigeria’s Legal System as one of its greatest and most eminent Jurists. His intellectual prowess is undisputably affirmed. His penchant for unraveling difficult and most intricate points of law and facts is outstanding and inimitable. His mastery and use of English Language in the expatiation of his reasoning is romantically simple but seductively gripping with magnetism. His religious dedication to research on virtually every legal issue is stupendous as it is gargantuan. He was a truthful and honest Judge. He lived for Law and died for Justice – the quintessence of all his judgments.”

The first two Idigbe Lectures, on my invitation, were given by the Hon. Justice Kayode Eso on Thursday, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2008 and Justice Chukwudifu Oputa on ..... 1986.

Eso's Lecture was entitled "The Nigerian Grundnorm" and Oputa's was "Human Rights in the Legal and Political Culture of Nigeria". Both occasions were of course huge successes, establishing the University of Benin as an appropriate forum for making original and ground breaking, even controversial proposals on a major legal subject.

I then had to leave the University. Since then many other brilliant and exciting Idigbe Lectures have been given here, illuminating difficult and complex issues in the law.

So it gives me exceptional pleasure to be here today, following the footsteps of legal giants in honouring a colossus of the Nigerian Supreme Court, Hon. Justice Chukunweike Idigbe. I thank the Vice-Chancellor, the Dean, Faculty of Law and my Colleagues at the Faculty for this singular honour.

The Topic I have chosen for this lecture is, "Nigeria: The Unfinished Federal Project". I have chosen it because I strongly believe, that apart from the scourge of corruption, the stubborn and determined refusal of the Political Ruling Class in Nigeria to recognize, honour and implement the covenant of the Founding Fathers of Nigeria, to institute and practice strict, true and real Federalism, is responsible for our backwardness in social and economic development, for our failure to imbibe a culture of democracy and the rule of law, and of course the re-occurring crises in the Nigerian Political System.