

**BODY OF SENIOR ADVOCATES OF NIGERIA**

**CODE OF DRESSING & DECORUM**



**FOR SENIOR ADVOCATES OF NIGERIA  
(FOR COURTROOM, SPECIAL COURT SESSIONS &  
CEREMONIAL OCCASIONS)**

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*Effective 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2013*

**1. TITLE**

**This is the Code of Dressing & Decorum for Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SANs) in relation to courtroom, special court sessions and ceremonial situations, as well as general decorum expected of the rank.**

**2. BACKGROUND**

a. The question of dressing for lawyers, and in this instance, Senior Advocates of Nigeria is an important aspect of the profession. It was

**Irvine of Lairg, Lord Chancellor who said:**

*“In no particular order; it is thought that court dress symbolises the authority of office holders; helps instill a respect for the law; reminds the legal professionals that theirs is a solemn role; emphasises the impersonal and disinterested approach of the judge; helps court users identify who's who; and the wigs provide a degree of security to the wearers, through anonymity, especially to judges in criminal cases”.*<sup>1</sup>

b. The Committee established by the Body of Senior Advocates of Nigeria to provide guidance on Dressing and Decorum for SANs (which succeeded the rank of Queen's Counsel (QC) in Nigeria on 3rd April, 1975), had recourse to where the traditions of the profession, and indeed of the Inner Bar emanated from – the United Kingdom. Ede & Ravenscroft of London, a combination of the robe-making business of Joseph Webb Ede, and the wig-making family business of his wife, Rosanna Ravenscroft became a reference point for information and clarification of the relevant details.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Irvine of Lairg, Lord Chancellor, A Lord Chancellor's Department Consultation Paper on Court Working Dress in England and Wales, May 2003, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dca.gov.uk/consult/courtress/index.htm>, Accessed July 5, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Woodcock, *Legal Habits: A Brief Sartorial History of Wig, Robe and Gown*, Ede and Ravenscroft, Good Books, 2003, London

### 3. LEGAL ROBES

- a. Most jurisdictions adopt similar legal robes for Silks (Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Queen's Counsel, Senior Counsel or President's Counsel), albeit with slight differences.
- b. SANs have two forms of legal robes, depending on the occasion, namely – for appearance in Court before a Judge, or for an approved ceremony or other special official occasions. They are:
  - i. The Working robe, also referred to as the court dress, and
  - ii. The Ceremonial robe.

Both forms of dressing stand out distinctly, and for good order, they should not to be mixed or combined for any reason.

### 4. THE WORKING ROBE (COURT DRESS)

- a. SAN's wear wing collar, bands and short wig. The male silk is robed in a special black long-sleeved waistcoat with three sleeve buttons.<sup>3</sup> This waist coat is styled by Ede & Ravenscroft as “**Nigerian SAN-styled waist coat**”. There are also Nigerian robe makers who tow the same line of styling, albeit with minor differences. **Annexure Two shows the full court dress** (with the exception of the second inner coat).
- b. The black stuff gown of a junior barrister is replaced with a long black silk gown styled by Ede & Ravenscroft as the '**Nigerian SAN-styled long black silk/wool gown**'.<sup>4</sup>
- c. A female Senior Advocate of Nigeria wears a similar gown and wig to that of her male counterparts. It is this silk gown which gives rise to the colloquial reference to SANs as "Silks" and to the phrase "taking silk" referring to their appointment.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The three buttons on the sleeves is similar to that which Bishops have sewn unto their long sleeves. The waist coat for Barristers (non-Silks) should have no buttons by the sleeves. That is the distinguishing mark.

<sup>4</sup> They are mostly produced by Ede & Ravenscroft, although there are more affordable variants from Stanley-Lee and other Nigerian robe shops.

## **5. THE CEREMONIAL ROBE**

- a. For special court sessions and ceremonial occasions, SANs wear the distinctive full-bottomed wigs and their silk gowns (this time with gold coloured trims at the edges). The silk gown is not the same as that worn when appearing in court.<sup>6</sup> Annexure One shows the full ceremonial robe.
- b. Ceremonial occasions shall include such special ceremonies or occasions of a sober nature as may from time to time be approved by Resolution of the Body of Senior Advocates of Nigeria or by the Legal Practitioners Privileges Committee.

## **6. SPECIFICS FOR SAN ROBES**

- a. The ceremonial and court robes are shown in the Annexures below. The Queen's Counsel ceremonial attire can be observed in the fourth annexure, where the court coat and waistcoat are used as an under-dress. In Nigeria, this is substituted with the Silk sleeved waistcoat worn by SANs.
- b. Annexure One below provides an image of SAN ceremonial attire, which goes with a ceremonial full-bottomed wig. SANs retain the dress coat bag (black rosette), which buttons onto the back of the ceremonial SAN robe (see Annexure Three).
- c. While Black court Breeches, black patent leather court shoes with cut-steel buckles and black cotton tights are compulsory for QCs, they are optional for SANs who can replace the aforementioned elements with striped trousers and black court shoes if they so desire. The design of the robe is unique to the jurisdiction and adds further dignity and splendour to the Nigerian legal profession when viewed in the context of senior counsel attire from other Commonwealth countries.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Other persons wearing gowns made of silk material are not said to have “taken silk”.

<sup>6</sup> QCs use the same silk gown for the ceremonial attire as well as for working attire.

- d. Finally, the SAN working attire mirrors that of the QC (see Annexure Two), with only two exceptions. First, the SAN sleeved waistcoat replaces the court coat and waistcoat. The sleeved waistcoat is multi-functional for SANs as it is worn for both ceremonial and working purposes. Second, the dress coat bag (black rosette) is worn on the back of the working robe.<sup>8</sup>
- e. Traditionally, a pure silk robe is worn by Learned Silks when in court, irrespective of jurisdiction. In Nigeria, these tend to be worn by older Silks and Attorneys-General (of individual States / the Federation) as a supplementary robe and thus reserved for prestigious cases. The supplementary nature of the fabric means that it is vulnerable to abrasive surfaces and therefore, it would not stand the test of time should it be worn frequently. The silk-wool blend is more durable due to the wool content; this is preferred for daily use.

## 7. THE BLACK ROSETTE

- a. When wearing the full bottomed wig, SAN's should have a black rosette hanging from the back of the neck. Although the rosette was originally intended to catch oil and powder that might otherwise mark the silk gown. Modern wigs, however, are made of horsehair and so there is no longer any oil or powder, but then the rosette is still worn.
- b. In resolving the question of the rosette, Andrew Foustanos of Ede & Ravenscroft recounts that. He further stated that -  
*“...from the QC regulations, the rosette is only worn on ceremonial occasions. Senior Advocates of Nigeria maintained continuity with the United Kingdom in using it on the ceremonial robe. However, over time a number of SANs decided that they wished to use it on their working robe in order to further highlight their position in court too.”*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Conversations between Committee's Chief Bolaji Ayorinde SAN and Mr. Andrew Foustanos of Ede and Ravenscroft London on Tuesday, February 7, 2012

- c. The rosette is a symbol to denote the status as silks, and has become a permanent feature on the working robe of several SANs. All SAN-style working robes incorporate a button on the neckline of the robe where the rosette can be attached. **The black rosette must be worn with the ceremonial robes, but is optional for working (court) robes.**

## **8. CEREMONIAL AND WORKING ROBES NOT TO BE COMBINED**

- a. For good order, the ceremonial robes should not be mixed with the working robes. The full bottomed wig must be worn only with the ceremonial gown (with gold coloured trims on the edges). The working robes should be worn only for courtrooms.
- b. If for any reason a Senior Advocate of Nigeria is unable to attend a special court session or a ceremonial occasion in full ceremonial robes, he could attend in full working robes. Where for some reason, he neither has his ceremonial robes nor the working robes, he could attend wearing a dark suit, but be gracious enough to excuse himself from any processions involving his brothers. He may later join his brothers, while seated or better still, at the reception stage of the event.

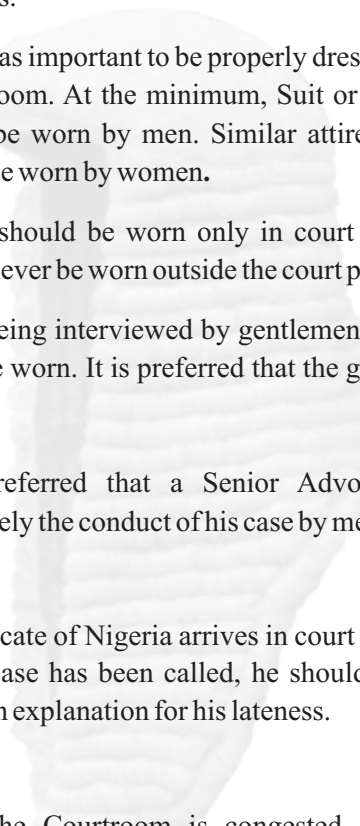
## **9. DECORUM**

In addition to the normal decorum and courtroom etiquettes expected of all Counsel, members of the Inner Bar are expected to exhibit a higher level of decorum and to provide leadership of the Bar at all times. Some of the specifics worth mentioning include (but are not limited to) the following:

### ***a. Courtroom and Dressings***

- i. Clean striped or dark conservative trousers or skirts should be worn with the gown as well as dark shoes. The gown should be neat at all times. White shirts, Collars and Bibs should be white, neat and sharp.



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- ii. Wigs and Gowns do not have to be worn in uncontested chambers. Wigs and Gowns must never be taken off in court in annoyance especially in Court. Respect for the Court remains a hallmark of leadership.
  - iii. As much as is practicable, Counsel should avoid wearing bibs and wing collars after court sessions and outside of the court precincts.
  - iv. It is just as important to be properly dressed in judges' offices as in a courtroom. At the minimum, Suit or jacket, with shirt and tie should be worn by men. Similar attire or a conservative dress should be worn by women.
  - v. Gowns should be worn only in court or court precincts. They should never be worn outside the court precincts.
  - vi. When being interviewed by gentlemen of the Press, a Wig must never be worn. It is preferred that the gown should also be taken off.
  - vii. It is preferred that a Senior Advocate of Nigeria avoids completely the conduct of his case by media.

***b. Lateness***

If a Senior Advocate of Nigeria arrives in court after the Judge has begun sitting and his case has been called, he should offer an apology to the Court and give an explanation for his lateness.

***c. Courtroom***<sup>10</sup>

- i. When the Courtroom is congested, and other Lawyers are standing, it is good leadership at the Bar to be magnanimous with privileges and allow standing Counsel (especially the older ones) to sit, to the extent possible; and with the indulgence of the Judge and other Senior Advocates.

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<sup>10</sup> For those interested in a more detailed account of legal etiquette and courtroom decorum, please refer to the S.Tupper Bigelow, *Legal Etiquette and Courtroom Decorum*, Carswell Co, 1955, United Kingdom.

- ii. Altercations between SANs (for instance as to seniority or sequence of privileges) should be completely avoided in open court or to the hearing of junior counsel and non-lawyers.
- iii. Courtesy to opposing Counsel irrespective of age and status at the bar remains a hallmark of leadership and finesse.

***d. Overall Carriage***

- i. Members of the Inner Bar should at all times carry themselves in a reserved manner, with a degree of calm, civil and gentle manners as depict their leadership positions at the Bar.
- ii. This includes dressing appropriately at all other times even outside of the court premises, and treatment of persons generally.
- iii. It must always be remembered that every member of the Inner Bar is somewhat an Ambassador (for good or bad) of all other members.

## **10. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

- |                                      |               |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>a. Chief George Uwechue, SAN</b>  | <b>Member</b> |
| <b>b. Chief Ladi Williams, SAN</b>   | <b>Member</b> |
| <b>c. Chief Bolaji Ayorinde, SAN</b> | <b>Member</b> |
| <b>d. Mr. Kemi Pinheiro, SAN</b>     | <b>Member</b> |
| <b>e. Dr Fabian Ajogwu, SAN</b>      | <b>Member</b> |

**DATED THIS 15<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF JUNE 2013**

.....  
**SGD CHAIRMAN**

.....  
**SDG SECRETARY**

**FIRST ADOPTED BY THE BODY OF SENIOR ADVOCATES OF NIGERIA  
ON FEBRUARY 16, 2013  
REVISED & ADOPTED BY THE BODY OF SENIOR ADVOCATES OF NIGERIA  
ON JUNE 15, 2013**

**ANNEXURE ONE**  
**SENIOR ADVOCATE OF NIGERIA CEREMONIAL ROBE**  
**FOR SPECIAL COURT SESSIONS AND CEREMONIAL**  
**OCCASIONS**



***TO BE WORN WITH FULL BOTTOMED WIG, BLACK ROSETTE, AND BLACK SHOES,  
WITH A PAIR OF WHITE HAND GLOVES WITH ATLEAST ONE HELD, NOT WORN***

**APPENDIX TWO**  
**SENIOR ADVOCATE OF NIGERIA WORKING ROBES**  
**FOR COURTROOM**



*TO BE WORN WITH SHORT WIG, BLACK SHOES.*  
*BLACK ROSETTE IS OPTIONAL*

**ANNEXURE THREE  
THE BLACK ROSETTE**



***ROSETTE MUST BE WORN WITH THE CEREMONIAL ROBE;  
IT IS OPTIONAL FOR THE WORKING ROBE***







