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Today we meet Attorney Benedict Oregbemhe, the Managing Partner of Benfield Attorneys and Solicitors, Lagos, Nigeria, a young, dynamic, agile and energetic professional.

Q: I've never traveled to Nigeria....

A: You must visit Nigeria very soon! Nigeria is a Federation comprising 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Nigeria is in West Africa, situate between the Sahel to the north and the Gulf of Guinea to the south in the Atlantic Ocean. It's the most populous country in Africa with over 225 million population.

Lagos State is the largest city in Nigeria and also the largest city in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. Lagos counts more than 15 million inhabitants, whereas Kano, the second most populous city, registered around 4.1 million inhabitants.

Q: Which is the legal system in Nigeria?

A: Nigeria has a mixed legal system comprising English common law, Sharia and customary law. The 1999 Constitution is the supreme law of Nigeria, prevailing over all other sources of law. In fact, any laws that are inconsistent with the Constitution are void to the extent of the inconsistency.

English common law, judicial precedents, predominantly from the Supreme Court, form a key part of the Nigerian legal system, even if certain rulings and legislation are not rigidly applied: customary law is often applied for members of ethnic groups particularly concerning personal and family matters.

Q: And what about the muslim population, established in the Northern part of Nigeria? There are about 50% of entire population, aren't they...

A: Yes, infact twelve Northern States have introduced Sharia legal system. Sharia used to be categorized as a customary law in Nigeria. This position has changed given the judicial pronouncement by the Supreme Court in the case of Alkamawa v Bello (1998) LPELR-SC.293/1991. The independence of the judiciary is guaranteed by Sections 4, 5 and 6 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) ("The 1999 Constittion). The Nigerian court system consists of the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, Federal High Court, High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, High Court of a State, Sharia Court of Appeal of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Sharia Court of Appeal of a State, Customary Court of Appeal of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Customary Court of Appeal of a State. And such other courts as may be authorised by law to exercise jurisdiction on matters with respect to which the National Assembly may make laws and also such other court as may be authorised by law to exercise jurisdiction at first instance or on appeal on matters with respect to which a House of Assembly may make laws.

The appointment of a person to the office of Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN) is made by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the recommendation of the National Judicial Council subject to confirmation of such appointment by the Senate while appointment of a person to the office of a Justice of the Supreme Court is made by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the recommendation of the National Judicial Council subject to confirmation of such appointment by the Senate. To qualify to hold the office of CJN or a Justice of the Supreme Court, such a person must

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have been qualified to practice as a legal practitioner in Nigeria and has been so qualified for a period of not less than fifteen years.

The appointment of a person to the office of President of the Court of appeal is made by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the recommendation of the National Judicial Council subject to confirmation of such appointment by the Senate and appointment of a person to the office of a Justice of the Court of Appeal is made by the President on the recommendation of the National Judicial Council. To be appointed to hold the office of a Justice of the Court of Appeal, such a person must be qualified to practise as a legal practitioner in Nigeria and has been so qualified for a period of not less than twelve years.

For dispute resolution at international level, Nigeria is a member of the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes, as well as a signatory to the 1958 New York Convention. More, very important is the Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020 (as amended) which regulates the registration, promotion and operation of companies in Nigeria and the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission Act 2004, which permits foreign ownership in all industries except for those listed on the negative list.

Q: You live in Lagos....

A: Yes, I live in Lagos, the commercial centre of West Africa. After obtaining a Bachelor Degree (LL.B) from the University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, I also had a Master's Degree (LL.M) from the University of Lagos, where I presently live with my family. My law firm is also in Lagos. I am the Managing Partner of Benfield Attorneys and Solicitors, a corporate and commercial law firm based in Lagos, Nigeria.

Q: What kind of legal services does your firm provide?

A: Benfield Attorneys and Solicitors ("BAS") is a corporate and commercial law firm, focusing on cross-border corporate commercial and M&A transactions, shipping and maritime, business registration, trade and investment, commercial litigation and international commercial arbitration. The firm also engage in cross-border debt recovering, corporate immigration, IP, labour and employment, etc.

Q: I read that you and your firm also provide services in shipping and maritime law....

A: Yes, it's one of our most important specialty. We provide legal services or assistance in shipping and Maritime, General maritime litigation and defences, Admiralty, Marine Insurance and Cargo Claims, Marine survey and loss adjustment advisory, Ship sale and purchase, Ship arrest, detention and release to enforce maritime obligations, Drafting and reviewing of Charter Party Agreements, International Carriage of Goods, Seamen crew's legal representation.

Q: As Managing Partner of Benfield Attorneys and Solicitors what are your branches of activity?

A: I am an investment law expert in Nigeria. I render a seamless advisory legal services or assistance to both Nigerian and foreign companies or investors and I also appear before the regulatory authorities in Nigeria. I have a substantial transactional and litigation experience spanning business registration,

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commercial dispute resolution and international commercial arbitration, shipping and maritime, and corporate immigration law and practice.

Q: Let's say you're a commercial lawyer...

A: Yes, I am both a commercial and litigation Lawyer. It may please you to know that I always use my commercial experience in resolving most knotty commercial litigation so as to preserve the commercial relationships between the parties.

Q: It's a very important and broad sector of law...

A: Let's say that we have a lot to do! I also handle commercial transactions that involve applying and obtaining from the NIPC, Ministry of Interior and the Nigerian Immigration Service, business permit, business registration, expatriate quotas and Combined Expatriate Residence Permit and Alien Cards (CERPAC), etc.

Q: What aspects do you focus on in assisting your clients?

A: I focus on the specific needs of my corporate and individual clients and work dedicatedly to provide them with the best legal solutions and I have been achieving that purpose. I also provide comprehensive legal services to my clients seeking seamless cross-border work across the continent.

Q: Why have you joined WILL?

First and foremost, for international visibility and marketing and to promote my person as a professional and the firm under which I practice my trade. As a professional and Managing Partner of Benfield Attorneys and Solicitors, the firm has exclusively been working at an international level, through the handling of challenging and complex multi-jurisdictional cross-border transactions, deals and disputes resolution.

So, I personally believe in networking and collaborating with colleagues across border for cross border transactions. I joined WILL to leverage on its international platform, great reputability and goodwill to project my firm's international visibility and as a marketing strategy too. We are achieving our purpose of joining WILL due its professionalism, wealth of experience and pro-activeness of its members.

Q: And, coming to the end of this interesting conversation, I wanted to ask you what are your hobbies?

A: Reading and writing, traveling, watching sport etc.

We thank you so much our esteemed colleague, Benedict Oregbembe of Lagos, Nigeria, for giving us the chance to know him better and for getting to know about his activity and beautiful country.

Interview by Giulia Perri