The renowned Professor of law and staunch Pan-Africanist addressed the audience on the life of a lawyer during difficult times. His introduction generally stressed that lawyers are called to make monumental decisions in their line of duty that has a bearing to access to justice. He spoke that lawyers must stand on the highway of justice and ensure that the law protects all man.

He reiterated that before the law everyone is equal and that in the face of injustice it is incumbent on lawyers to become stalwarts of justice. This is particularly important for lawyers practicing in Africa where many states have leaderships with a tendency of using the law to oppress their subjects. It is important to remain true to the oath lawyers are called to.

The speaker also addressed the audience against the habit of silence. The legal profession is about giving the oxygen to the principles that underpin the rule of law. If lawyers were to be silent in the face of injustice such silence would be an acquiescence to the act of injustice. He enjoined lawyers to always be heard at all critical times even if their lives are under threat- ‘the strongest man in the world is the man who stand alone’. He challenged lawyers to be open against oppressive laws and regimes and must not always hide behind numbers and organizations that lawyers subscribe to. The rule of law enjoins those in the legal profession to be warriors beyond bread and butter issues and be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice and be the defenders of justice. Lawyers must be reminded that the practice of law can only thrive in an environment where the law is respected.

The speaker addressed the audience on the importance of an independent judiciary. It is important to have arms of government which are separate, distinct which enjoy autonomy. History has demonstrated that a country can survive bad executive and bad legislature but cannot survive if the judiciary is not independent from another arms’ influence. It is important for lawyers to be in the fore front of making sure that the judiciary remains independent. It is incumbent on lawyers who occupy public office to remain true to the rule of law and protect the judiciary. He gave the example of Omar Al Bashir and how unfortunately he undermined the independence of the judiciary and the same institution is now scrutinizing him. Had he known better he would have protected the independence of the judiciary when he was able to. Lawyers must be warriors of justice without expectation of rewards. Lawyers must avoid commercializing justice. The calling of being a lawyer is higher than that of
earning millions. Being a learned professional comes with a responsibility to ensure that justice is done in accordance of the law.

The speaker noted that one of the greatest obstacles of being a lawyer in the SADC region is the pursuit of the ‘fee note’. Lawyers must avoid abdicating their role as protectors of the society which is the whole idea of access to justice by pursuing money. The speaker challenged members of the legal protection to remove obstacles in their jurisdictions that hinder access to justice. The speaker questioned if common law, roman - dutch law, latin and English law has been interpreted in a simpler way understandable to lay members of the society. He warned lawyers to avoid adopting foreign methods of western and eastern societies which is incompatible and not understandable to our societies. The speaker challenged SADC lawyers to create legal systems that are germane to our societies as that is what access to justice is all about. We must ensure that our laws are domestically responsive.

Lawyers must train paralegals and educate the public on legal issues. It is incumbent upon all lawyers to undertake at least 10% of our cases pro bono. The speaker challenged SADC legal jurisdictions to harmonize dispute resolution institutions and interrogate the possibility of cross border practice and for SADC lawyers to practice in any jurisdiction of choice as a way of improving access to justice. The speaker challenged the audience in the commercial sector to draft contracts that have dispute resolution mechanisms that are Afrocentric. The speaker challenged SADC lawyers to forge home grown solutions so that there is justice that is in accordance with our circumstances. Access to justice must resonate with our communities.

The speaker advised the audience that he has observed that there are mega firms that have encroached into our economies. These firms are slowly infiltrating our practices and Africans are becoming less useful to their immediate environment. The speaker raised concerns over the erosion of the values and principles that underpin the legal profession. Moreover, SADC LA was challenged to harmonize what head of states discuss when they convene and what SADC LA discuss when they meet. SADC LA must ensure that the legal infrastructure which is setup by the heads of state ensures that access to justice is amongst key consideration. There is need to harmonize legal systems in Africa and SADC specifically to regulate trade barriers, tariff barriers, border barriers and currency barriers.
The speaker challenged members of the legal profession to engage political class not in a confrontational manner but in a manner that opens their eyes. This must be done so that there is always a connection between the political class. The legal profession must always be in the forefront of articulating policy. It was emphasized that justice is not the way, but it is the goal. Lawyers must be a bridge between the lawmakers and the society affected by these laws. A lawyer’s duty is to serve the strong and weak alike. It is to ensure a proper delivery of justice. It is always important to wed one’s conscience and the things that they do.

The speaker concluded by reiterating his message and urging lawyers to be warriors of justice.