



Nigerian Copyright Commission Warns DJs: No More Playing Music Without Paying Royalties

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Disk Jockeys (DJs) are the lifeblood of Nigeria's entertainment scene, setting the mood and driving the energy at everything from intimate weddings to massive concerts.

Their role is undeniably crucial; however, the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC) has recently turned a spotlight on their practices. In the **Copyright Advisory No. 4 issued on June 2, 2025 (the Advisory)**, the Commission, in line with its statutory functions under the Copyright Act 2022 (the Copyright Act), delivered a clear message that **playing music publicly without proper authorization is against the law and will not be tolerated**. This means an end to the

informal approach many DJs have traditionally taken. The unauthorized use of copyrighted music is now explicitly being treated as copyright infringement, carrying serious legal repercussions. This article will delve into the implications of this Advisory for DJs and other public music users, while also examining its broader significance for copyright enforcement and steps for protection within Nigeria's thriving music industry.

Overview of the advisory

In the Advisory, the NCC cautioned DJs against the public performance of music without obtaining the necessary copyright licences to enable them to use the songs legally. The Commission admonished that playing copyrighted musical works without authorisation from the copyright owner or a Collective Management Organisation (CMO) constitutes an infringement under the Act and may give rise to civil and criminal liabilities. It outlined the statutory penalties, stating that any person who communicates or makes a copyrighted work available to the public without authorisation shall be liable on conviction to a fine of not less than ₦1,000,000, imprisonment for a term of not less than five years, or both.¹

Notably, the Advisory draws its authority from the Copyright Act,² which confers exclusive rights on copyright owners of musical works and sound recordings. These rights include the exclusive right to do and authorize the doing of the following: reproduce, publish, or perform the work in public, produce, reproduce, perform or publish any translation of the work, make any audiovisual or commercial use, distribute, broadcast, and communicate the work to the public.

These rights entitle the owners to enforceable economic remedies to the exclusion of others. Understanding the scope of the copyright owner's exclusive rights is particularly important for DJs, whose performances are often central to the business activities of commercial establishments, such as clubs, bars, and event venues. In simple terms, when DJs use musical works without the permission of the copyright owner or their authorized CMO they infringe on these exclusive rights and can be held liable.

To address the challenges DJs face in obtaining necessary copyright licenses, the Advisory highlights a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** between the **Deejays Association of Nigeria (DJAN)** and the **Musical Copyright Society Nigeria (MCSN)**. Under this MoU, DJAN is authorized to coordinate the payment of royalties on behalf of its members to the MCSN based on a negotiated tariff. This arrangement simplifies the licensing process for DJs, ensuring compliance with copyright laws while supporting the creators of the musical works they perform.

¹ Section 44(7) of the Nigerian Copyright Act, Cap. C28, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN) 2022

² Sections 9 and 12 of the Nigerian Copyright Act, Cap. C28, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN) 2022

Objective of the advisory

At its core, the Advisory aims to boost awareness and legal compliance among DJs by clearly outlining their obligations under the Copyright Act. It also seeks to simplify the licensing process by recognising the MCSN as the official body for royalty collection for musical works, thereby eliminating confusion and fostering greater compliance within the industry. Additionally, it promotes the key partnership between DJAN and MCSN that allows DJs to pay royalties through a structured tariff system, making legal compliance easier. The NCC also emphasizes its readiness to enforce the law, pledging to investigate and prosecute violations while collaborating with other agencies to ensure industry-wide adherence.

This development holds significant implications for copyright protection and enforcement in Nigeria.

The NCC's action against unauthorised DJ performances underscores the importance of copyright compliance and the necessity of obtaining proper licences for public use of creative works. There has been growing concern that some DJs generate income from such use without remitting corresponding royalty payments; a trend that may contribute to the broader issue of undervaluing intellectual property in the entertainment industry. Tackling this issue is a welcome step towards ensuring that right holders receive fair and deserved compensation, which is central to the purpose of copyright law. It also reinforces the vital role of Collecting Societies in administering rights and distributing royalties, thereby strengthening the overall enforcement framework for creative works.

Understanding what constitutes copyright infringement as DJs

Many Nigerian DJs wrongly assume that streamed or downloaded music is free to use publicly, but this is false. Using copyrighted music in public without proper licensing is a violation of the Copyright Act, regardless of intent. Some of the ways DJs infringe on rights of copyright owner includes:

- **Playing music publicly without a license;**
- **Remixing, doing a compilation or rearranging songs without permission is a violation of the right to create derivative works;**
- **Using pirated or illegally downloaded songs violates reproduction rights; and**
- **Performing at venues that do not have proper licenses.**

Impact of the advisory and steps to legal compliance

The Copyright Advisory is set to make a strong impact on Nigeria's creative industry by reinforcing the legal protection of music rights and promoting fair compensation for artists. Fortunately, the path to compliance is straightforward and includes:

1. Registering with DJAN:

Registering with the Deejays Association of Nigeria (DJAN) helps DJs legally perform music as members of DJAN are automatically licensed by MCSN enabling them to enjoy discounted MCSN DJ licensing fees and protection from copyright violations and penalties. The MOU between MCSN and DJAN authorizes DJAN to coordinate the payment of royalties on behalf of its members based on a negotiated tariff. Registering with DJAN also offers professional recognition, advocacy, and industry support, making compliance easier while promoting a more organised and accountable DJ community.

2. Obtain Licenses: DJs are required to obtain DJ licenses and authorizations before performing music in public. These licenses are issued by approved Collective Management Organisations (CMOs),

in this case, the MCSN. CMOs collect royalties on behalf of artists and rights holders and grant legal permission to use their works. DJs not registered under DJAN can obtain these licences directly from MCSN.

3. Legal Sourcing of Songs:

Beyond licensing, DJs must also respect musicians' rights by sourcing music legally. This means downloading or purchasing songs only from authorised platforms or distributors. Using pirated files or unlicensed music collections undermines the very creators who make the music and exposes DJs to further legal consequences.

4. Working with Compliant Venues:

DJs should ensure that the venues they work with are also compliant with copyright licensing requirements.

5. Improving Knowledge:

DJs should strive to educate themselves on basic copyright laws to understand what constitutes legal usage of music.

6. Record Keeping:

DJs should maintain records of licensed music libraries, license agreements, and payments made to CMOs, as these can serve as proof of compliance in the event of disputes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the recent Advisory issued by the NCC in June 2025 reflects increasing emphasis on the enforcement of copyright compliance within the entertainment sector. It is therefore incumbent upon DJs to align their activities with the legal framework governing the

public performance of musical works. By obtaining the necessary authorisations and licences, they contribute to the protection of intellectual property rights and foster a more accountable and sustainable creative industry in Nigeria.

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