

**The 2nd Conference of the
Caribbean Association of Judicial Officers
“Bringing the Law closer to the People”**

7th October, 2011

Environment: Is there a case for specialization within the Court System

PANELISTS:

1. Her Honour Judge Sandra Paul, Chairman of the Environmental Commission of Trinidad and Tobago;
 2. Madame Justice Charmaine Pemberton, Judge of the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago;
 3. Mr. Justice Tony Ross (Retired) Judge of the Eastern Caribbean;
 4. Judge Sandra Oxner (Retired) Judge of Nova Scotia (Canada)
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The forum on the environment focused on numerous environmental issues within the Commonwealth Caribbean region and within the international global environment at large. The forum began with a short video presentation hosted by former U.S Presidential Candidate Al Gore. The video presentation was generally centered around global warming and its effects on the environment. The video also highlighted the enormity and complexity of the environmental issues that the world is facing today and the need to establish or draft legislation to properly regulate the effects of improper use of the global environment.

Justice Oxner stated that it is important to take into consideration that many people that commit environmental offences are not usually cognizant of the fact that they are doing so and therefore this should be considered when drafting laws pertaining to environmental issues.

The most pivotal issue that seemed to be discussed by the panel was whether criminal law courts possess the expertise to effectively address environmental issues, and if not, whether there is a genuine need for a specialized court to deal with environmental issues. Most of the panelists and attendees alike seemed to agree that specialized courts would be better suited for many reasons such as, the expertise of the members.

It was noted that Trinidad and Tobago has a specialized court, which is referred to as the Environmental Commission of Trinidad and Tobago. This court is an impartial and independent body of superior court of records established via the Environmental Management Act, 2000. The commission is comprised of a full time chairman, a deputy chairman and three part time members. The Chairman and Deputy Chairman are attorneys at law of not less than ten years standing, part-time members compliment staff based on their knowledge and or experience with environmental issues.