

# Successes in Judicial Education Across the Region



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# Message from the Management Committee

2025 ends and 2026 begins in contexts of great challenge. In 2025 there has been an escalation of conflicts globally – the most notable being overt wars in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan. Which is not even to speak of several other international flashpoints that have erupted into armed conflicts, only to boil down but remain simmering. For us in the Caribbean, 2025 ends and 2026 begins also with unprecedented geo-political tensions in the southern Caribbean that are escalating incrementally. CARICOM itself is under unprecedented strain. And no one can be quite sure what may unfold.

In 1967, Martin Luther King delivered "A Christmas Sermon on Peace" at Ebenezer Baptist Church, in the USA. We share excerpts:

Everywhere paralyzing fears harrow people by day and haunt them by night. Our world is sick with war; everywhere we turn we see its ominous possibilities... If we assume that life is worth living, if we assume that [human]kind has a right to survive, then we must find an alternative to war...Our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation; and this means we must develop a world perspective.

I have a dream that one day humans will rise up and come to see that they are made to live together as brothers [and sisters].

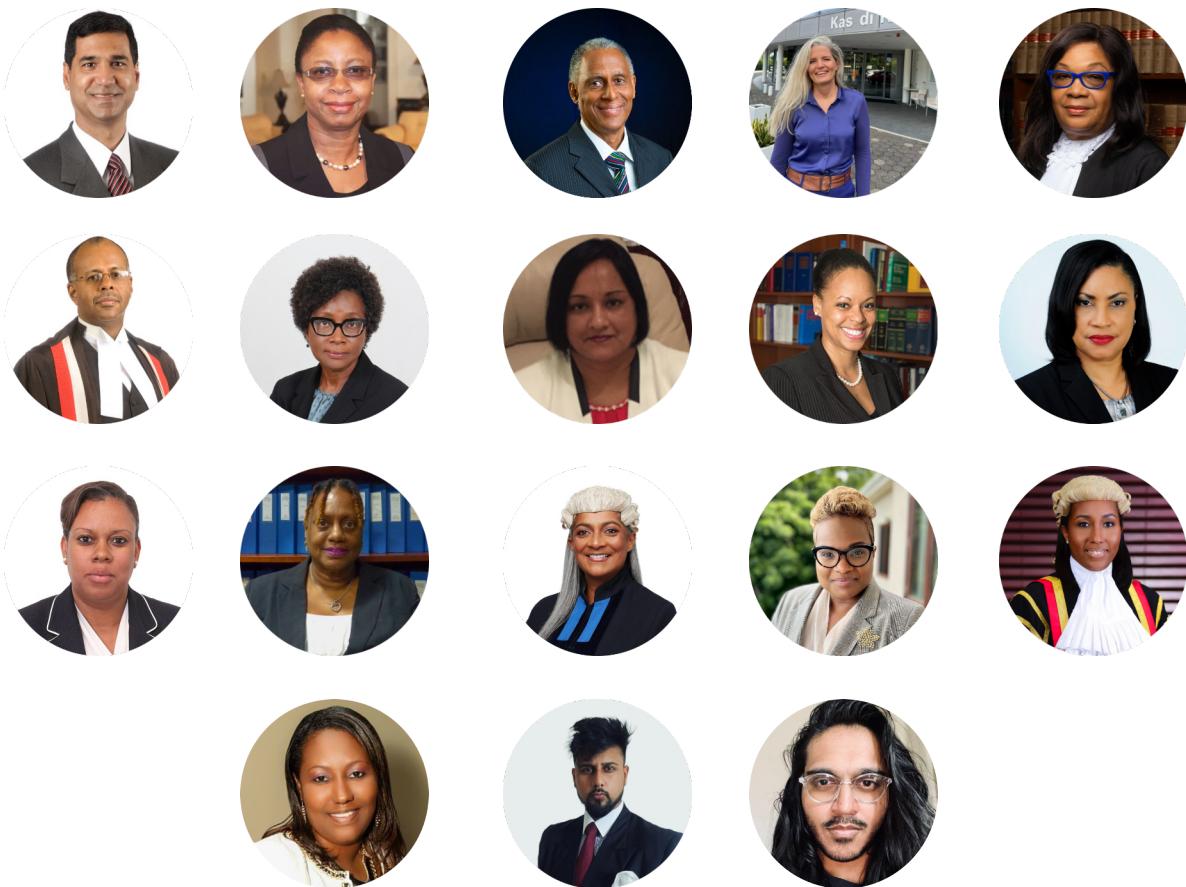
Moreover, in the region the effects of climate change had disastrous effects in the form of hurricane Melissa, a Category 5 storm that devastated parts of Jamaica including court facilities. The CAJO has extended offers of assistance and support to the Judiciary of Jamaica.

This issue of the CAJO News focusses on ***Successes in Judicial Education Across the Region***. A true celebration of meaningful and transformative interventions across the Caribbean.

As well it highlights the ICJs 2025 Advisory Opinion on Climate Change, a document of seminal importance; maintains a focus on Judicial Wellbeing; and reports on appointments and retirements across the region (for which we received information).

The CAJOs primary response to global and regional crises is education. Education is transformative. It can change minds and hearts. And if it is research based, it can potentially shift entrenched perspectives. Notable interventions for 2025 were the CAJOs launch of its Mentorship Programme and its Law and Logic Series. It continued regional, territorial and international interventions. And completed the electronic publication of a Criminal Bench Book for the Bahamas. All notable achievements.

The Management Committee extends best wishes to all Judicial Officers, Caribbean Judiciaries and their partner institutions. We look forward to working with you as we negotiate our unfolding futures together.



# Continued Judicial Education and Institutional Developments in Guyana

*Monique Ifill, Court Administrator on behalf of the Judiciary of Guyana*

## **Judicial Training Programme – Strengthening the Judicial Office (January 2025)**

In January 2025, the Judiciary of Guyana collaborated with the Caribbean Association of Judicial Officers (CAJO) to conduct an intensive four-day training programme for Judicial Officers (Justices of Appeal, High Court Judges, Commissioners of Title, Registrar, Deputy Registrars and Magistrates) and Judicial Research Assistants. The sessions were built around active participation and practical learning, offering a structured opportunity for participants to refine key judicial competencies. The programme addressed the full cycle of judicial work, including methods for managing the progress of cases, strengthening legal research techniques, organising and drafting legal opinions, structuring judgments, and approaching constitutional interpretation. Participants also examined the responsibilities and ethical expectations associated with judicial roles, with additional sessions dedicated specifically to the ethical duties of Judicial Research Assistants.

A major component of the programme was the joint development of a framework for a Judicial Research Assistant Handbook, intended to bring greater consistency and clarity to research practices across the Judiciary. Participants were supported by a range of preparatory and in-course materials, including judicial writing guides, reference cases, and documents on judicial conduct.

This training is expected to improve the quality and efficiency of judicial work by enhancing the way cases are managed, strengthening the research and analytical support provided to Judicial Officers, and improving the structure and clarity of written decisions.

The focus on ethics and professional standards reinforces the Judiciary's commitment to integrity and strengthens public confidence in its work. Collectively, the programme contributes to more timely, coherent, and transparent decision-making and supports the Judiciary's broader goal of delivering justice effectively across Guyana.



Programme faculty and participants

## Judges Conference (July 2025)

The Judges' Conference 2025 was held on 10-11 July under the theme "Judicial Excellence in an Era of Economic Transformation and Technological Change." Over two days, Judges examined the growing demands placed on the Judiciary by Guyana's rapidly expanding oil and gas sector through a series of sessions led by Dr. Alicia Elias-Roberts, who is the Dean of the Faculty of Law at the UWI St Augustine Campus in Trinidad and Tobago. Dr. Elias explored the legal and procedural complexities expected to arise from the country's economic transformation.

The programme also addressed the increasing impact of technology on judicial work, including digital transformation in courts, artificial intelligence, and the emergence of AI-related offences in the Caribbean. Presentations from representatives of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and regional experts provided guidance on adapting judicial practice to these technological developments.

Day Two focused on strengthening the Judiciary's institutional capacity. Judges reviewed the Judiciary of Guyana's strategic priorities, received presentations from the Hon. Justice Bryan Sykes, Chief Justice of Jamaica, and Mrs. Lorraine Henry-Grant, Director of Human Resource Management of the Court Administration Division of the Judiciary of Jamaica, on their experience in implementing a national judicial strategic plan, and worked through the International Consortium for Court Excellence (ICCE) survey. Additional discussions covered court vacation practices and their impact on case scheduling. The conference concluded with an interactive session led by the Honourable Justice of Appeal Mr. Navindra Singh and the Honourable Justice of Appeal Mr. Nareshwar Harnanan on common challenges and errors in judging.

Overall, the conference improved judicial preparedness for new economic and technological realities, supported institutional development, and reinforced the Judiciary's commitment to high standards in decision-making and court administration.



Judges participating in the Conference

## **Magistrates' Conference (October 2025)**

The Magistrates' Conference 2025 was held on October 24–25 under the theme "Enhancing Competencies and Embracing Technological Change." The two-day event provided Magistrates with focused training on core judicial functions and emerging technological issues affecting the justice sector. The programme included in-depth sessions on bail and sentencing delivered by the Honourable Justice of Appeal, Madam Justice Jo-Ann Barlow, offering guidance on legal principles, judicial discretion, and decision-making in the Magistrates' Courts. Mrs. Diana O'Brien, Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions, facilitated a session on paper committals, clarifying procedure and evidentiary requirements. Magistrates also examined issues of professional conduct and judicial demeanour in a session on ethics led by Her Worship Principal Magistrate Faith McGusty and Her Worship Magistrate Rhondel Weever.

Day Two shifted to topical legal matters and the impact of digital transformation. Presenters addressed the law relating to landlord and tenant relationships, AI-enabled offences in the Caribbean, and practical uses of artificial intelligence that could support judicial work. The Judiciary's own technological initiatives were explored through presentations on digital tools and systems currently in use. The conference concluded with an interactive dialogue with the Honourable Chancellor (ag) and Honourable Chief Justice (ag). The training strengthened the capacity of Magistrates to manage cases effectively, apply legal principles accurately, adapt to technological change, and uphold high ethical standards, thereby supporting more efficient and modernized service delivery across the Magistracy.



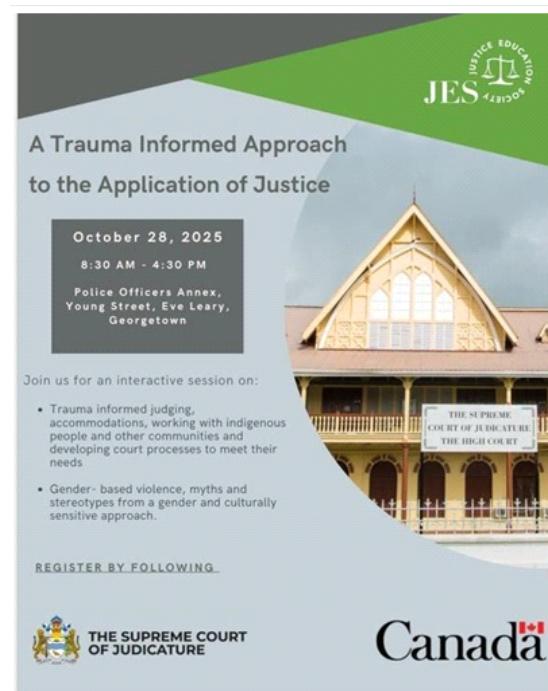
Magistrates participating in the Conference

## **Judicial Education and Support (JES) training in Guyana on a trauma-informed approach to justice (October 2025)**

In October 2025, the Judiciary of Guyana benefited from specialised training delivered through the JES programme on integrating a trauma-informed approach into the administration of justice. The training focused on strengthening the capacity of Judicial Officers to recognise the effects of trauma on individuals who interact with the justice system, including victims, witnesses, accused persons, and even court personnel. Emphasis was also placed on ensuring access to justice to indigenous communities.

Participants of this training were Magistrates who were introduced to the principles of trauma-informed practice, including awareness of trauma's psychological and behavioural impact, the importance of creating safe and supportive court environments, and strategies for minimising re-traumatisation during court processes. The sessions explored how trauma can influence memory, communication, demeanour, and decision-making, and how these factors should be carefully considered in judicial assessments, case management, and courtroom interaction.

The training further examined practical adjustments courts can implement—such as improved communication techniques, sensitivity in questioning, and procedural flexibility where appropriate—to ensure that processes remain fair while also responsive to the realities of trauma. Emphasis was also placed on the well-being of justice sector professionals, recognising the cumulative effects of exposure to traumatic material and the need for healthy coping practices.



This initiative is expected to strengthen the Judiciary's ability to deliver justice that is compassionate, equitable, and grounded in an understanding of human experience. By building a more informed and responsive court system, the training contributes to improved access to justice, enhances public confidence, and supports the fair and respectful treatment of all persons who come before the courts.

## **Support and Administrative Staff Training**

In 2025, the Judiciary of Guyana continued strengthening staff skills and operational efficiency through a comprehensive series of training programs, building on initiatives from 2024. Key efforts included:

- **Communication and Business Writing:** 53 staff members, including Administrative Officers and Legal Clerks, improved written and oral communication skills through Association of Business and Management Administrators (ABMA) certified training, enhancing report writing, correspondence, and presentations. A total of 123 employees have now been trained in business writing and communications—70 in 2024 and 53 in 2025.
- **Court Registry and Record Management:** 35 staff involved in records management were trained in digitization, inventory management, records appraisal that is focused on improving transparency, accountability, and efficiency in legal processes. A Registry and Records Management training was delivered by the Public Service Ministry's Department of Training from 24 - 25 June, 2025. Record management is a critical foundation for an effective justice system. Accurate, well-organised records help ensure that legal proceedings are conducted fairly, transparently, and efficiently. They provide a dependable account of case activity, safeguard the rights of individuals, and reinforce public confidence in the courts. When records are properly maintained, judicial officers and staff can access information more quickly, avoid unnecessary delays, and make timely, well-informed decisions.



Court Registry and Record Management Training Participants on a Site Visit to the National Archives of Guyana

- **Digital Skills:** As part of the Judiciary of Guyana's ongoing digitization efforts to enhance operational efficiency, it is essential that staff are proficient in modern office technologies. In this context, a partnership with the Guyana Police Force Zara Computer Centre has provided Microsoft Office training to court staff over multiple years: 44 employees in 2023, 55 employees in 2024, and 31 employees in 2025, from various courts across the country. Participants registered for both the Foundation and Advanced Microsoft Office programs. The 2025 training commenced in April and is ongoing throughout the year.

- **Customer Service:** 31 staff members received training in empathy, communication, and conflict resolution, improving public interactions and confidence in the Judiciary. The program targeted staff whose roles involve direct interaction with the public, including Office Assistants, Legal Clerks, Clerks and House-keeping staff. The training, held from 6-7 August, 2025, at the Public Service Ministry (PSM) Training Centre. Customer service training enhances the Judiciary's operations by improving public confidence in the justice system, fostering perceptions of procedural fairness, and equipping staff to interact professionally and respectfully with all court users. These skills support a more positive experience for the public while strengthening the effectiveness and professionalism of court operations.
- **Graphic Design and Photography:** Six staff members commenced Graphics Designing and Photography training to produce professional visual communication materials, geared towards improving internal and public engagement. The program, facilitated by the Nations School of Technology, commenced in July 2025 and will conclude in December 2025. Participants are undertaking three courses—Corel Draw, Adobe Photoshop, and Photography—to earn the Certificate in Graphic Design and Photography (CGDP).
- **Junior Staff Conference:** 364 junior staff participated in capacity-building sessions focused on ethics, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and customer service, fostering a professional, service-oriented culture. By strengthening the capacity of junior staff, this training is expected to positively impact day-to- day operations of the Judiciary. Staff will be better equipped to handle workplace challenges professionally, interact with colleagues and the public more effectively, resolve conflicts efficiently, and deliver high-quality customer service. The improved knowledge, skills, and awareness gained through the conference will contribute to a more efficient, ethical, and service-oriented work environment, ultimately supporting the Judiciary's mission to provide fair and effective justice to the public.



Some staff at the 2nd Annual Junior Staff Conference (May 28–30) with Hon. Chancellor(ag) Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards, Hon. Chief Justice (ag) Justice Roxane George, and senior Judiciary and Public Service Ministry officials.

- **Supervisors Conference:** 48 supervisors participated in conferences aimed at enhancing leadership, delegation, problem-solving, coaching, and customer service skills to improve team efficiency and workflow. Participants included staff in positions such as Senior Cleaner, Principal Assistant Secretaries – Finance, Clerks of Courts, Principal Clerk of Court, Administrative Officer, First Marshal, Store Keeper II, Senior Registry Officer, Registry Officer, Chief Accountant, Accountant, Senior Marshal, Court Reporting Manager, Senior Data Entry Clerk, Head of IT Unit, Senior Legal Clerk, Assistant Registrar, Personnel Officer, Principal Personnel Officer, and Administrative Assistant.



Some participants of the 4th Annual Supervisors' Conference and senior Judiciary and Public Service Ministry officials

- **Leadership and Management Training:** 21 middle- and upper-management staff undertook specialized programs in leadership, emotional intelligence, human resource management, project management, and occupational health and safety, strengthening strategic decision-making and high-performing teams.

Overall, these initiatives equipped staff at all levels with practical and strategic skills, enhancing professionalism, operational efficiency, and service delivery, thereby supporting the fair and effective administration of justice in Guyana.

## Infrastructural Developments

In 2025, the Judiciary of Guyana continued its strategic efforts to expand and modernize court infrastructure across the country, reinforcing its commitment to accessible, efficient, and community-centered justice. Through the commissioning of new Magistrates' Courts, specialized Children's and Mental Health Courts, the Judiciary has enhanced its capacity to deliver fair and timely legal services. These state-of-the-art facilities feature modern courtrooms, child-friendly spaces, specialized rooms for domestic violence and drug-treatment cases, and amenities for staff well-being, reflecting a holistic approach to justice that prioritizes both the needs of the public and the welfare of Judicial Officers and staff.

- **Mahdia Magistrate's Court** – 10 January, 2025: The Judiciary commissioned a modern Magistrate's Court in Mahdia, Region 8, Potaro-Siparuni (Region 8) an interior region in central Guyana. The facility features a fully equipped courtroom, child-friendly spaces, and dedicated rooms for domestic violence and drug-treatment cases, enhancing access to justice in remote areas.



On January 10, 2025, the Madhia Magistrate's Court was commissioned

- **Mabaruma Magistrate's Court** – 21 February, 2025: A new modern Magistrate's Court in Mabaruma, Region 1, Barima-Waini region, an interior region in northern Guyana was commissioned. The court includes a fully equipped courtroom, child-friendly, domestic violence, and drug treatment rooms, reflecting the Judiciary's commitment to equitable, community-centered legal services.
- **Providence Magistrate's Court and Conference Room** – March 21, 2025 The Judiciary initiated construction of a Magistrate's Court and Conference room in Providence, East Bank Demerara, Region 4, Demerara-Mahaica, central Guyana. The project, will provide modern courtrooms and amenities for Judicial Officers and staff.
- **Friendship Magistrate's Court** – 31 March, 2025: A modern Magistrate's Court in Friendship, East Bank Demerara, Region 4, Demerara-Mahaica, central Guyana was commissioned. The facility includes a fully equipped courtroom, child-friendly and domestic violence rooms, a drug treatment room, and living quarters for Magistrates and a clerk of court, enhancing service delivery in region 4, Demerara-Mahaica, central Guyana, the most populous region.
- **Anna Regina Magistrate's Court** – 2 July, 2025: The Judiciary commissioned a state-of-the-art Magistrate's Court in Anna Regina, Region 2, Pomeroon-Supenaam, a populous town in Guyana. The facility includes Magistrates' and clerk's living quarters and modern courtroom technology, improving legal service delivery on the Essequibo Coast.
- **Charity Children's Court, Essequibo Magisterial District** – 12 June, 2025: The third Children's Court in Guyana was commissioned at the Charity Magistrate's Court, Region 2, Pomeroon- Supenaam in partnership with UNICEF. The court provides a child-sensitive, restorative approach, with modern courtrooms and child-friendly spaces.



On February 21, 2025, the Mabaruma Magistrate's Court, constructed for \$277 million, was commissioned.



Chancellor (ag) Hon. Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards, Chief Justice (ag) Hon. Justice Roxane George, Hon. Attorney General Mohabir Anil Nandall SC, MP, and Judicial Officers at the sod-turning ceremony for the new Providence Magistrates' Court (March 21, 2025)."



A modern Magistrate's Court in Friendship, East Bank Demerara, was commissioned on March 31, 2025.



The third Children's Court in Guyana was commissioned at the Charity Magistrate's Court in partnership with UNICEF on June 12, 2025

- **Mental Health Court, Demerara** – 26 June, 2025: Guyana's first Mental Health Court was launched at the Demerara High Court Compound, in partnership with UNICEF. The courts will provide a restorative, rehabilitative approach for individuals with mental health-related offending behaviours, initially serving Georgetown, New Amsterdam, and Essequibo magisterial districts.

## **Social, Cultural, and Other Events**

The Judiciary of Guyana began the year with the third annual **Law Year Opening on 14 January, 2025**, at the Demerara High Court, coinciding with the January Criminal Assizes. The ceremonial parade featured an all-female police contingent and the Guyana Police Force Military Band. Acting Chancellor of the Judiciary, Hon. Madam Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards, OR, CCH, and Acting Chief Justice, Hon. Madam Justice Roxane George, OR, SC, addressed achievements from 2024 and plans for 2025, including expanding specialized courts, increasing judicial staffing, integrating technology through e-litigation and case management systems, and continuing outreach and public awareness initiatives.



The Former Chancellor of the Judiciary (ag.), Hon. Madam Justice Yonette Cummings- Edwards, OR, CCH inspected the all-female police contingent at the Opening of Law Year 2025

On 21 February, 2025, the Judiciary launched its official flag at the **commissioning of the Mabaruma Magistrate's Court in Region No. 1, Barima-Waini, Essequibo**. Designed by staff from "Team Supreme," the flag features horizontal red, cream, and black bars with Lady Justice at its centre, symbolizing zeal, fairness, authority, and impartiality. The inaugural flag-raising was attended by the Hon. Prime Minister, Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Phillips, Hon. Acting Chancellor Cummings-Edwards and Hon. Acting Chief Justice, Roxane George, the Hon. Attorney General, judicial officers, and regional officials, marking a milestone in the Judiciary's identity.

Criminal Assizes in 2025 were held according to the High Court schedule:

- Demerara: second Tuesday in January, first Tuesday in April, first Tuesday in June, and first Tuesday in October.
- Essequibo: third Tuesday in February, third Tuesday in May, and fourth Tuesday in October.
- Berbice: first Tuesday in February, third Tuesday in June, and third Tuesday in October.

These assizes addressed serious indictable offences including murder, manslaughter, attempted murder, sexual crimes, and other major offences. Demerara hosted four sessions throughout the year, Berbice held sessions in February, June, and October, while Essequibo convened three sessions in February, May, and October. The assizes played a key role in reducing case backlogs, ensuring timely adjudication, and maintaining the rule of law across all regions.

On 4 April, 2025, the **Vigilance Magistrate's Court, Region 4, Demerara-Mahaica held a Grand Open Day**, welcoming students, teachers, parents, and community members. Attendees toured court facilities, learned about judicial processes, and interacted with representatives from multiple agencies, including the Guyana Police Force, Guyana Defence Force, Guyana Fire Service, and Ministries of Health and Education. The initiative aimed to demystify the court environment, promote transparency, and foster public confidence in the Judiciary.



Student Open Day at the Vigilance Magistrates' Court

The Judiciary further expanded its outreach on 2 July, 2025, with the first **"Career Day" at Lethem Magistrate's Court in Region No. 9, Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo**, an interior location in the vast southern part of Guyana. Over 200 students, teachers, and community members engaged with magistrates, officials, and representatives from multiple government agencies to learn about employment opportunities, judicial processes, and career pathways in law and public service. Magistrates provided guidance on education and career development, while students received practical insights into the operations of the Children's Court.

On 26 July, 2025, an event, in observance of **Wellness Day**, was held for Judicial Officers and staff across all three counties (Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice) of Guyana, featuring a grand cookout and games, promoting camaraderie, team-building, and the well-being of judicial officers and staff. From June to August 2025, the Supreme Court of Judicature hosted ten students under the Ministry of Education Work-Study Attachment Program and four law students from the University of Guyana.

Conducted in two phases of five weeks each, the program provided students with practical exposure to various departments and registries, familiarizing them with the policies, procedures, and operations of the Judiciary.

The program concluded with a farewell ceremony on 22 August, 2025, where students shared their experiences and received guidance from Hon. Mr. Justice Navindra Singh, Acting Chief Justice, Hon. Madam Justice Priscilla Chandra-Hanif, supervisors, and senior staff. Each participant was awarded a certificate of completion.

On 20 November, 2025, the Supreme Court of Judicature hosted its fourth **Drug Treatment Court (DTC) Graduation**, marking a milestone in the Judiciary's ongoing efforts to support rehabilitation and reduce recidivism. Two participants from the Georgetown and East Demerara Magisterial Districts successfully completed the programme. The ceremony, held in the High Court Conference Room, was attended by the Acting Chancellor and Acting Chief Justice, members of the Judiciary, the DTC team, graduates' support networks, and both past and present participants. Graduates shared testimonies highlighting reconciliation with family and securing stable employment. They continue in the programme under a one-year probation with ongoing supervision.



Drug Treatment Court graduates and the DTC Teams at the Graduation Ceremony

Throughout 2025, the Judiciary also observed and supported several national and international celebrations, including **Guyana's Independence Day May 26, Mashramani to celebrate Guyana's Republic anniversary on February 23, International Women's Day, International Day of Women Judges, World Down Syndrome Day, Easter, Phagwah, Eid-Ul-Adha, Youman Nabi, Diwali, Judicial Wellness Day, Arrival Day, , Mothers' and Fathers' Days, Emancipation Day, World Day Against Trafficking In Persons, Amerindian Heritage Month, World Mental Health Day, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, and 16 days of Activism against Gender Based Violence** with activities promoting staff engagement, community outreach, and public awareness.



Courts nationwide celebrate Phagwah (Holi), embracing cultural diversity

Overall, the events of 2025 reflect the Judiciary of Guyana's commitment to accessibility, transparency, education, rehabilitation, wellness, and cultural engagement, while strengthening public trust and fostering an inclusive, supportive judicial environment across Guyana.

# A Celebration By and Of Women Judges Across the Caribbean

*The Caribbean Association of Women Judges*

March 2025 witnessed an inspiring array of activities throughout the Caribbean as members of regional Associations of Women Judges (AWJs) commemorated International Day of Women Judges (IDWJ) 2025. From engaging school visits and thought-provoking discussions to book launches and community outreach, these events underscored the invaluable contributions of women in the judiciary.

## **Bahamas: The Launch of BCAWJ and Engaging the Youth**

The newly formed Bahamas Chapter of the Caribbean Association of Women Judges (BCAWJ) celebrated with a week of impactful activities. Judges visited primary schools in Nassau, Grand Bahama, and Abaco, reading the poem For All The Women Who Dared by Assistant Chief Magistrate Ancella Evans and presenting judicial attire in an interactive session. Schools also received copies of *Strong Bahamian Women, Icons and Legends* by Pamela S. Gomez.



A moment from the Engaging the Youth event

The highlight of the week was the Lunch and Launch of the BCAWJ on March 13 at the renowned Graycliff Restaurant. Honourable Dame Anita M. Allen delivered a keynote address on "Navigating the Judiciary as a Woman – Lessons Learned," described as "truly a masterpiece." The unveiling of the BCAWJ's Certificate of Registration marked a significant milestone for the Association.

## **CAWJ E-Book: A Legacy of Wisdom**

The Caribbean Association of Women Judges (CAWJ) launched its e-book, *Wisdom from Across Caribbean Judiciaries*, dedicated to The Honourable Madame Justice Désirée Bernard and Justice Joan Charles, the first Patron and Immediate Past President of the CAWJ respectively. This collection of judicial insights explores themes such as gender equality, Caribbean unity, and the role of AI in the judiciary. The Honourable Zaila R. McCalla, OJ, Chief Justice (Retired), praised the book as a "vital resource for understanding the essential role of women judges."

The postscript of the CAWJ E-Book reflects on the insights shared by members of the Caribbean Association of Women Judges (CAWJ), emphasizing themes of equality, justice, perseverance, and innovation. It highlights the pioneering contributions of distinguished Caribbean women judges, including Justice Désirée Bernard, Justice Joan Charles, and Justice Marie Elizabeth (Betty) Bourne, who paved the way for future generations. Their words underscore the challenges and responsibilities of judicial leadership and the ongoing pursuit of fairness and accessibility in the justice system. The postscript concludes with congratulations to the CAWJ for this meaningful initiative and encouragement to continue striving for a more just and inclusive society.

## **Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court AWJ: A Regional Celebration**

Each territory within the **Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court Association of Women Judges** marked IDWJ with diverse initiatives:

- **St. Kitts and Nevis:** Court staff wore purple, green, or white in recognition of the day.
- **Antigua and Barbuda:** Judges visited Antigua Girls High School and the Sunshine Home for Girls, engaging in mentorship and book presentations.
- **British Virgin Islands:** A food drive provided aid to women in need.
- **Saint Lucia:** Activities included a church service, social dinner, wellness talk, and the presentation of tokens to female court staff.
- **Grenada:** A television interview highlighted the role of women in the judiciary.

### **Guyana: Honouring Justice Désirée Bernard's Legacy**

The **Guyana Association of Women Judges (GAWJ)** participated in a televised interview on NCN Guyana and hosted its inaugural **Memorial Lecture** in honour of Justice Désirée Bernard. The Honourable Chancellor of the Judiciary, Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards, delivered an insightful lecture on *Article 29: Women's Participation in Decision-Making. Have We Arrived?* She applauded regional AWJs and the IAWJ for their dedication to advancing gender equality in the judiciary.



Snapshot from the event

## **Jamaica: Wisdom from the Bench**

The **Jamaica Association of Women Judges (JAWJ)** hosted a virtual **Fireside Chat** featuring three distinguished retired judges: Justice Zaila McCalla, OJ, Justice Hilary Phillips, CD, and Justice Gloria Smith, CD. They shared invaluable advice on judicial integrity, mentorship, and work-life balance. The discussion concluded with reflections on competitiveness among female judicial officers and the importance of solidarity in the judiciary.

## **Trinidad and Tobago: Empowering Young Minds**

The **Trinidad and Tobago Association of Women Judges (TTAWJ)** commemorated IDWJ with the launch of its children's book, *All Children Have Rights*, written by Master Alana Jameson. The event at Febeau Government Primary School featured an engaging reading session, a word search competition, and interactive discussions with students on children's rights.

## **A Unified Commitment to Justice**

The collective efforts of AWJs of the Caribbean in celebrating IDWJ 2025 have highlighted the unwavering commitment of women judges in the region to justice, mentorship, and community engagement. These initiatives not only honour the legacy of trailblazing women in the judiciary but also inspire future generations to pursue legal careers with confidence and determination.

# Bahamas Judicial Education Institute 2025 Year in Review

## *Bahamas Judicial Education Institute*

The Bahamas Judicial Education Institute (BJEI), the educational arm of the Bahamian judiciary, proudly reflects on an eventful and impactful year in 2025. Guided by its mission to strengthen judicial excellence and foster innovation, the Institute advanced critical initiatives that will shape the future of justice in The Bahamas.

### **Judicial Training Programs**

- **Annual Training of Judicial Officers and Judicial Research Counsel under the theme "Equipped to Dispense Justice – Judicial Competencies and Wellbeing, January 2025:** Judges were re-introduced to the role of artificial intelligence as a valuable tool in the justice system, with Mr. Bevil Wooding of the Caribbean Agency leading the discussion. The program featured a demonstration of MaxScribe, a digital reporting platform that integrates recording, speech recognition, and transcript editing to streamline court reporting and improve efficiency. Additional sessions covered digital forensic evidence, expert evidence, and Justice 360: Wellbeing at the Centre, highlighting both technological innovation and the importance of judicial wellness in strengthening justice delivery.
- **Lunch and Learn with vLex Justis, March 2025:** Judges were introduced to Vincent AI, a powerful legal research tool developed by vLex to support tasks such as advanced research and document analysis. The Chief Justice had foreshadowed its acquisition as part of a broader vision to strengthen judgment writing within the Judiciary. Now formally acquired, Vincent AI has already proven invaluable, enhancing efficiency, accuracy, and precision in the production of judgments.

Its integration marks a significant step in modernizing judicial processes and equipping the Bench with cutting-edge resources to meet the demands of contemporary adjudication.

- **Gender Equality & Justice Training – conducted by UN CEDAW, June 2025:** The objective of the training was to strengthen the capacity of judges in The Bahamas to apply a gender perspective in decision-making and interpret domestic laws in line with CEDAW and other human rights principles. The program addressed gender stereotypes and cultural norms that affect justice delivery, review national laws and standards on equality, develop indicators for monitoring gender mainstreaming, and equip judges to use international legal instruments to eliminate bias and promote substantive gender equality in the judiciary.
- **International Day for Judicial Wellbeing, July 2025:** On 25 July 2025, in celebration of the inaugural International Day for Judicial Well-Being under the theme *"Upholding Justice, Empowering Wellness"*, the BJEI organized health checks across the various courts in Abaco, Grand Bahama and New Providence. In addition, the Institute offered 30-minute movement sessions tailored to beginners, intermediate, and advanced participants, encouraging physical activity as a complement to mental wellness. This initiative, delivered in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Wellness, marked a significant step in normalizing judicial wellness and is expected to continue in 2026.



Snapshot from Upholding Justice, Empowering Wellness



Snapshot from Upholding Justice, Empowering Wellness

- **Genes and Justice – DNA Evidence Training, November 2025:** A groundbreaking training session was convened on the use of DNA evidence in criminal and civil trials, underscoring its growing importance in modern adjudication. The program explored diverse themes, including:
  - The Science behind the Swab: Scientific truths about DNA testing
  - Guilt by Genetics: Admissibility and standards of DNA evidence in criminal adjudication
  - Genetic Betrayal: Paternity fraud claims and their impact on justice
  - Two local case studies, including the high-profile matter involving Anna Nicole Smith

The session was enriched by contributions from a laboratory professional and a member of the Royal Bahamas Police Force, alongside judges from the Bench and a senior attorney from the Office of the Attorney General. Together, they provided valuable insight into the evolving role DNA evidence will continue to play in judicial proceedings, bridging science and law to ensure fairness and accuracy in the administration of justice.

## Publications

- **Courts in The Bahamas:** Published in June to commemorate the **Conference of Caribbean Chief Justices and Heads of Judiciary** under the theme *“Judiciaries in Transition”*, this concise volume (under 100 pages) offers a glimpse into the rich history and traditions of The Bahamas’ Judiciary. It provides valuable insight into the evolution of the courts and their current role within the nation’s system of governance.
- **The Bahamas Criminal Bench Book:** In collaboration with the **Caribbean Association of Judicial Officers (CAJO)**, the BJEI produced in December the Bahamas Criminal Bench Book — a milestone achievement for the judiciary. Scheduled for rollout in 2026, this resource will serve as a cornerstone for consistency and clarity in criminal jurisprudence in the Bahamas.

# The CCJ Academy for Law Successfully Hosts Its Largest Biennial Conference

*Caribbean Court of Justice*

The CCJ Academy for Law successfully hosted its 8th Biennial Conference from 26–28 November 2025 at the Hyatt Regency Trinidad under the theme "The CCJ at 20: Reflections on Caribbean Jurisprudence". Attracting over 400 judicial officers, legislators, legal practitioners, academics, law students and other civil society stakeholders from across the region, this year's event was the largest Conference ever hosted by the Academy. Participants engaged in discussions on the evolution, impact, and future of Caribbean jurisprudence.

Declaring the Conference open, the Honourable Mr Justice Winston Anderson, President of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and Chair of the CCJ Academy for Law, reflected on the significance of the moment. He remarked that 'The Conference theme invites us to reflect on the strides made, the progress achieved, and the paradigm shifts inspired by the region's apex court, as well as on the promises and potential for the future. As the educational arm of the Court, the CCJ Academy considered it fitting to bring down the curtain on this year's anniversary celebrations by presenting the opportunity to examine the Court's landmark judgments and the impact that the Court has had on the Caribbean legal landscape and the administration of justice.' Additionally, President Anderson paid tribute to the late Mr Justice Wit, former Judge of the CCJ, describing him as an integral member of the Academy whose scholarship and vision helped shape modern Caribbean jurisprudence.

Also delivering remarks at the Opening Ceremony, Ms Lisa Shoman, SC, General Counsel, CARICOM (Caribbean Community) Secretariat, emphasised the regional importance of forging a distinct Caribbean jurisprudence.

She stated that political independence compelled Caribbean legal practitioners to 'ensure that we work to shape our own legal landscape, to forge a Caribbean jurisprudence that is a true reflection of our own unique culture, our particular social and economic realities, and that girds and supports our integration process as the Caribbean Community.'

During the Opening Ceremony, regional and international development partners also reaffirmed their support for strengthening justice institutions throughout the Caribbean. Her Excellency Cécile Tassin, Ambassador of the Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Trinidad and Tobago, highlighted the EU's enduring partnership with the Court, noting that 'since 2010, the European Union has been honoured to support the CCJ in its mission to advance access to justice and judicial excellence in the Caribbean. The EU strongly believes that supporting justice institutions in our partner regions is essential for democratic governance, the protection of human rights, gender equality, citizen security, and sustainable socio-economic development. Effective and accessible justice systems serve as the foundation upon which inclusive and resilient societies are built.'

Mr Anton Edmunds, General Manager of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Caribbean Country Department, observed that the Court's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary represents 'more than a milestone in the CCJ's institutional journey; it is a testament to how far we have come as a region in shaping our own narrative of justice. The Court's legacy rests not only on its rulings, but on its unwavering commitment to excellence, integrity, and accessibility – values that resonate deeply with the IDB, and its ONE Caribbean programme's vision of fostering sustainable, inclusive development through regional cooperation and institutional strengthening.'

Commending the CCJ and the Academy for their leadership in strengthening the rule of law in the region, Dr Isaac Solomon, Vice-President (Operations) of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), opined, 'CDB salutes the CCJ and the Academy for their contributions on rule of law; access to justice, including by the poor; and regional integration.'

He also encouraged attendees to 'work together toward a justice ecosystem that is more deeply integrated, technologically-enabled, people-centred, and capable of supporting the ambitious development agenda of a dynamic Caribbean Community.'

The opening ceremony also featured the launch of the publication "**Caribbean Court of Justice: Striving for Excellence – 20 Years of Evolving Justice**": a commemorative book featuring summaries of CCJ decisions and scholarly contributions from leading jurists and legal practitioners across the region.

The Conference marked an important leadership transition within the CCJ Academy for Law. The Honourable Mme Justice Ononaiwu, CCJ Judge, was named the new Chair of the Academy, while the Honourable Mme Justice Mira Dean-Armorer, Justice of Appeal of Trinidad and Tobago, was appointed Deputy Chair. Their appointments were warmly received by participants, who recognised the critical role of the Academy in advancing judicial education and legal development across the region.

A significant outcome of the Conference was the adoption of the forward-looking **Port of Spain Declaration on the Development of Caribbean Jurisprudence**. Participants called for targeted convergence of legislation in appropriate areas while respecting the diversity of legal systems in the region. They advocated for the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms in our constitutions, encouraged review of the continued relevance of savings law clauses in Commonwealth Caribbean constitutions and stressed the importance of enhanced public education on constitutional matters. Participants also reaffirmed their commitment to the continued implementation of the **Needham's Point Declaration on Criminal Justice Reform** and welcomed the development of a digital dashboard to monitor progress on implementation across the region.

Participants recognised the importance of judicial sensitivity to the evolving needs and realities of families in the Caribbean and encouraged modernisation of estate and probate practice. They highlighted the importance of environmental justice and the appropriate recognition and protection of intellectual property rights to sustainable development.

Participants affirmed the relevance of international legal obligations to the interpretation and application of domestic law. They advocated for greater awareness and enforcement of the rights of CARICOM nationals under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas.

The Port of Spain Declaration encourages the ethical use of technology within the judicial landscape as well as culturally grounded technological innovation to enhance access to justice. The Declaration acknowledges the important role of stakeholders other than the judiciary, in particular, legislatures, CARICOM, academia and the media, in the development of Caribbean jurisprudence. The Port of Spain Declaration will be published on the CCJ Academy for Law's website, [www.ccj.org](http://www.ccj.org).

The next conference will likely be held in November 2027.



A cross-section of attendees of the CCJ Academy for Law's 8<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference at the Hyatt Regency, Port of Spain



The Hon. Mr Justice Ronnie Boodoosingh, Chief Justice of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (centre), moderates a structured conversation on criminal justice reform.



From left to right: Mr Julian Belgrave, The Inter-American Development Bank, Country Representative, Trinidad and Tobago; Mr Anton Edmunds, General Manager, Caribbean Country Department, The Inter-American Development Bank; the Hon. Mme Justice Chantal Ononaiwu, CCJ Judge and new Chair of the Academy; the Hon. Mr Justice Winston Anderson, CCJ President and outgoing Chair of the Academy; Her Excellency Cécile Tassin, Ambassador of the Delegation of the European Union to Trinidad and Tobago; and Dr Isaac Solomon, Vice-President (Operations) of the Caribbean Development Bank at the Opening Ceremony of the Conference.

# IACHR, Promotion and Defense of Human Rights in the Caribbean

***José Luis Caballero, President of the IACHR***

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) seeks to develop strong institutional alliances in the Caribbean region in order to increase the participation of these countries in the InterAmerican Human Rights System with the aim of promoting fundamental rights and good governance, strengthening state institutions and public policies, and ensuring a human rights-based capacity building program for State and non-State actors.

Making history, the Inter-American System of Human Rights entered into force with the adoption of the *American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man* in Bogotá, Colombia, in April 1948. This Declaration was the first international human rights instrument of a general nature. The system was established for the promotion and protection of human rights in independent member states of the Organization of American States (OAS). The *American Convention on Human Rights*, also known as the *Pact of San José*, was adopted on November 22, 1969. It is an international treaty that contemplates the rights and freedoms that must be respected by the States Parties.

The Convention establishes two organs: the Inter-American Commission on Human and the InterAmerican Court of Human Rights. These two bodies make up what is known as the Inter-American Human Rights System, and both are competent to hear matters relating to compliance with the commitments assumed by the States Parties to the Convention, as well as to regulate its functioning.

## **Strengthening Judicial Education and Access to Justice: The Partnership with the CCJ**

The Commission continues its work to strengthen and deepen its collaboration with States of the region by promoting specific mechanisms that can have a greater impact on human rights in the region. In terms of judicial education, the IACHR recognizes the essential role of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) in advancing human rights protection in the region and has established a partnership with the Court to strengthen relations and alliances in the sub-region.

Both institutions recognize that every individual who is confronted with the rule of law is entitled to judicial guarantees that must be respected and protected by the State, and that their access to justice must be guaranteed. Articles 8 and 25 of the *American Convention on Human Rights* refer respectively to "judicial guarantees" and "judicial protection". Safeguarding these rights and principles is essential for the preservation of public order as well as for guaranteeing the protection of fundamental rights of all persons in the region.

It should be noted that since December 2022, the IACHR has emphasized the importance of the effective implementation of standards and recommendations, stressing the relevance of reinforcing the mechanisms of protection, and the promotion of human rights in States of the Caribbean. A series of joint activities with the CCJ has created opportunities to share good practices, to learn about challenges that arise in the execution of the respective mandates of the institutions, and to develop a closer collaboration with promoting and protecting human rights in the region.

On December 6th, 2022, the IACHR and the CCJ commenced collaboration with a dialogue to discuss a Joint Advocacy Plan. This was followed by a series of high-level dialogues focused on overcoming structural obstacles and violence against vulnerable groups. These dialogues addressed the prevention of violence against LGBTI persons and women, in July 2023; the use of force and investigation of violence against persons in human mobility, in March 2024; punishment and reparations for violence against indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities in November 2024.

At the end of 2024, the IACHR and the CCJ finalized an agreement to facilitate technical inter-change, to strengthen their mandates and facilitate the exchange of best practices. They agreed on a Work Plan for 2025 and 2026, with the continuation of high-level dialogues to increase the knowledge of the jurisprudence. As part of this effort, a high-level dialogue was held in November 2025, focusing on protection from human rights abuses in the Caribbean.

## **Tools for Impact and Protection in the Caribbean**

The IACHR's work in the Caribbean is guided by its five-year (2023-2027) Strategy for the Caribbean, which aims to increase the protection and defense for victims of human rights violations, especially for historically discriminated and marginalized groups, by promoting the understanding and use of IACHR's mechanisms.

In line with this strategic framework, special attention is given to the right to a healthy environment, and the implications of climate change actions for the enjoyment of human. Furthermore, the IACHR promotes the ratification of the American Convention on Human Rights and other Inter-American human rights' instruments relevant to discrimination, racial discrimination, the rights of persons with disabilities, and the rights of older persons.

The IACHR seeks to increase its impact in the Caribbean through its core mechanisms:

### **Petition and Case System**

This mechanism is a route for people who have suffered human rights violations. Through this system, the Commission investigates the facts, and issues recommendations to the responsible States. This impact is reflected in the landmark case of *Tyrone Dacosta Cadogan vs. Barbados*, concerning the death penalty, and IACHR's Merits' Report on *T.B. and S.H. vs. Jamaica*, addressing the criminalization of same-sex relations between consenting adults.

## **Precautionary measures**

This protective mechanism is provided for in Article 25 of the IACHR's Rules of Procedure, and may be requested by any person or organization that is in a situation of risk. Its relevance is illustrated by precautionary measures granted for the Indigenous Carib Community of Chinese Landing in Guyana, in response to threats linked to mining activities, and by those issued for the protection of six migrant children in Trinidad and Tobago facing possible deportation to Venezuela, where life and personal integrity were at risk.

## **Working visits**

Also called *on-site visits*, these visits have been carried out since 1961. In 2001, it was determined that at least two commissioners must participate in *on-site visits*, since they require detailed investigation, as well as the particular situation of a territory. To date, the IACHR has carried out 102 working visits.

## **Technical Cooperation and Promotional visits**

These visits support the IACHR's priorities by emphasizing regional engagement. Their specific objective is to learn of best practices, needs, and challenges faced by State and non-State actors regarding human rights promotion and protection within the Inter-American System, facilitating the Commission's response. Between 2023 and 2024, the IACHR carried out five promotional visits to Caribbean countries.

## **Public hearings**

Another mechanism that emphasizes IACHR's advocacy is public hearings, which address problems such as violations against populations in contexts of mobility, impunity in cases of extrajudicial executions, violations of freedom of the press and expression, sexual violence against women and girls, the territorial impacts of extractive industries, and discrimination against LGBT+ people.

This is the mechanism that is most used by non-state actors from the Caribbean. The Commission held seven public hearings concerning Caribbean States in 2024, followed by four hearings in 2025. Those in 2025 covered the impact of arms trafficking and violence in Haiti, the situation of indigenous peoples' rights facing extractive projects in Suriname, and challenges related to freedom of information in Guyana.

# Updates from the CAJO

*Candace Simmons-Peters and Elron Elahie, CAJO*

Outlined below are events, programmes, workshops, and initiatives the CAJO was engaged in between December 2024 to December 2025, as well as upcoming activities.

## **December 2024**

### ***Regional Workshop by the ParlAmericas UN Women, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago***

The CAJO was invited to participate in this regional workshop in Trinidad from December 4–6, 2024. The workshop entitled “Making the Work of Parliaments Responsive to the Needs of Women and Men”, provided a platform for CAJO to share on the development of Gender Equality Protocols for Caribbean Judiciaries. The aim was to encourage Caribbean Parliaments to consider and develop similar Gender Protocols/ guidelines to support parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, and institutions in promoting gender responsiveness in their internal operations and public-facing activities, including their legislative responsibilities.

## **January 2025**

### ***The Bahamas Judicial Education Institute Conference 2025***

The CAJO facilitated a session on January 6, 2025, entitled “Justice 360: Wellbeing at the Centre.” The session emphasized the importance of maintaining work-life balance and cultivating a sustainable work rhythm that integrates intentional movement, breathwork, and moments of stillness. Judicial Officers were invited to see themselves as leaders in wellness, extending this holistic approach to include judiciary staff and court users, promoting a 360° model of judicial wellbeing that supports the judiciary.

## ***Strengthening the Judicial Office: A Judicial Officer and Research Assistant Programme for the Judiciary of Guyana***

A four-day programme designed to employ different methods of learning towards achieving the objectives and outcomes of each module. Programme areas:

- Effective and Efficient Caseload Management
- Legal Research Tools and Preparation of Hearing Notes
- Principles of and Tools for Judgment Writing
- Constitutional Interpretation and Legal Argumentation
- Ethics and Professional Excellence in the Administration of Justice

### **February 2025**

## ***Social and Economic Rights: Constitutional Design and Adjudication***

A roundtable discussion put on by the Caribbean Association of Judicial Officers (CAJO) and the Faculty of Law, The University of the West Indies Mona in celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the Caribbean Court of Justice, which was inaugurated in 2005.

## ***Managing Conflict for ECSC Registrars***

On February 7, 2025, the CAJO hosted this training session for Registrars of the ECSC. To tailor the session to their needs, pre-session surveys were conducted to gather insights into their experiences and challenges. The session also included interactive group work, enabling participants to explore practical strategies and apply conflict management tools to real-world scenarios. The overall objective was to equip Registrars with effective approaches for navigating and managing conflict within their judiciary.

## ***Jamaica Judicial Wellbeing 3-Day Conference***

On February 8, 2025, the CAJO co-facilitated a session for the Jamaican Judiciary entitled "Justice 360: Wellbeing at the Centre."

The session aimed to provide research-based insights into the connection between stress, judicial wellbeing, and performance; the impact of stress on conflict and the importance of conflict management within the judiciary; and the role of mindfulness and wellbeing in supporting judicial function.

### ***Active Case Management: Projectising Cases – The Beating Heart of the Civil Litigation Process***

The CAJO hosted this judicial education training session on February 17, 2025, for judicial officers of the ECSC. This session focused on strengthening case management as a core function of judicial efficiency and effectiveness in civil litigation.

### **March 2025**

#### ***Launch of CAJO Membership for the 2025/26 Period***

The CAJO invited members to renew their membership for the upcoming period and welcomed new members; encouraging continued participation and engagement in its initiatives and programmes.

### **April 2025**

#### ***CAJO's Law and Logic Podcast Series***

In April 2025, the CAJO launched its Law and Logic podcast series as part of its ongoing commitment to preserving and sharing the insights of the Caribbean's leading legal minds. The series explores the stories behind the bench and delves into the reasoning and mental frameworks jurists apply to navigate the law in an increasingly complex and changing world. The inaugural episode featured an interview with Retired Justice Andrew D. Burgess of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), and plans are underway to release two additional episodes by the end of July 2025.



Click the image above to view the first installment

## May 2025

### ***CAJO Mentorship Orientation Programme***

The CAJO has launched its Judicial Mentorship Programme, providing experienced judicial officers (7+ years) the opportunity to mentor and guide mentees through the challenges of judicial responsibilities, ethics, and leadership. This programme aims to build a supportive mentoring community within the regional judiciary. CAJO's Orientation Session was held on May 15, 2025.

## July 2025

**Launch of Judicial Wellbeing 360** – in observance of the inaugural International Day for Judicial Wellbeing, the CAJO and the Caribbean Association of Women Judges (CAWJ) launched a collaborative Judicial Wellbeing 360 Playlist. The series of concise videos offers practical guidance and diverse perspectives on managing the unique stresses of judicial life: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLp-h3vsndw89DtWA-fbTSHVDC4RsXrMjy>

**CAJO News Issue 21** – “Global Democracy and Caribbean Courts” was published which explored the importance of Caribbean judiciaries against a backdrop of rapidly changing global democracy. As international norms on human rights, governance, and justice continue to influence national legal landscapes, and vice versa, Caribbean courts find themselves at significant intersections: <https://thecajo.org/cajo-news-issue-21-global-democracy-and-caribbean-courts/>

## August 2025

**Law and Logic** – release of the CAJO’s 2nd Episode of the Law and Logic Series interviewing retired CCJ President, Justice Adrian Saunders: <https://youtu.be/NkQ-PI7HEwA>



Conversation between Justice Saunders and Justice Jamadar from the second episode of Law and Logic

## September 2025

**CAJO Mentorship Programme** – official start of the CAJO’s mentorship programme which pairs judicial officers across the region for knowledge and insight sharing towards strengthening personal and professional roles in the administration of justice.

## October 2025

**Disability and Inclusion Awareness Guidelines** – presentation of the CAJO's Disability and Inclusion Awareness Guidelines for Judiciaries and Judicial Officers at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) Webinar on Access to Justice for Vulnerable Persons

**Update to Judicial Wellbeing 360** – additional videos featuring practical guidance and wellbeing practices were added to the Judicial Wellbeing 360 playlist.

## November 2025

**Webinar for HWLS** – the CAJO, on request by the Hugh Wooding Law Schools, facilitated a webinar for students on Navigating the Magistrates' Court. The webinar offered practical tools and tips for early career attorneys dealing with criminal matters in the Magistrates' Court.



Screenshot of the HWLS Webinar

## Ongoing and Upcoming Initiatives

**Criminal Bench Book for the Bahamas** - The CAJO is currently engaged in the co-preparation, review, editing, and finalisation of a Criminal Bench Book (CBB) for The Bahamas. This initiative aims to deliver a comprehensive, user-friendly resource to support judicial officers of the Bahamian judiciary.

**Wellness Research Survey** – The CAJO in collaboration with the CAWJ will be distributing a survey to Judicial Officers aimed at identifying the underlying causes of unwellness within the Caribbean Judiciary. This survey will also explore interventions, actions, and practices that promote sustainable, meaningful, and healthy work-life integration, and experiences of holistic wellbeing.

**CAJO 9<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference** - Planning has commenced for the CAJO's 9<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference which will be hosted in Guyana in 2026. The CAJO and Guyana teams have begun collaboration, with early planning meetings already held to lay the groundwork for the event.

The initiatives outlined above reflect CAJO's ongoing commitment to promoting judicial excellence, strengthening institutional capacity, and fostering meaningful collaboration across the region. Through its training programmes, resource development, and leadership initiatives, CAJO continues to support judicial officers at all levels in meeting complex and evolving demands. By investing in mentorship, wellbeing, innovation, and inclusive practices, CAJO remains focused on supporting judiciaries that serve the Caribbean with integrity, fairness, and effectiveness.

# The ICJ Advisory Opinion (AO) and Article 65 of the RTC and the Urgent Wake-Up Call, Hurricane Melissa

*Chelsea Dookie, Judicial Counsel, CCJ*

*The ICJ AO has done the excellent job of clarifying obligations of States in relation to climate change. While the Caribbean may not have a track record of significant pollution of the environment, we do not have the best track record of protection of the environment. The ICJ AO has said clearly that state obligations are to be done in line with the best available science and I think that CARICOM territories need to place more emphasis on science driven decision making as we chart our development pathways – Zachary Phillips BSc Political Science and Labour, LL.B and LL.M Public International Law*

Panelist: 'The ICJ Advisory Opinion on Climate Change: Implications for Teaching and Practice of Law and Medicine' (Webinar hosted on 29 September 2025 by the Law and Health Research Unit of the Faculty of Law, UWI Cave Hill Campus)

On 23 July 2025, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered a unanimous Advisory Opinion confirming that States have binding legal obligations under international law to protect the climate system, limit greenhouse gas emissions, and assist vulnerable countries disrupted by climate change. This landmark Advisory Opinion transforms climate action from political rhetoric into legal duty, with significant implications for CARICOM States, particularly under Article 65 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas (RTC), which mandates environmental protection within the Caribbean Community.

The full text of the Advisory Opinion is available at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/187/187-20250723-adv-01-00-en.pdf>

In summary, the ICJ clarified that States have binding legal obligations to address climate change under both customary international law and existing treaties. The Court emphasised the principle of due diligence, requiring States to take all necessary measures to prevent significant harm to the environment, including regulating greenhouse gas emissions and aligning national policies with the best available scientific evidence. It also reaffirmed the no-harm rule, meaning that States cannot allow activities within their jurisdiction to cause environmental damage beyond their borders. Importantly, the ICJ held that these obligations are not aspirational but they are enforceable duties grounded in international law to protect against climate change, an urgent and existential threat (ICJ Advisory Opinion, 2025 at para 73).

Additionally, the ICJ stressed that climate obligations extend beyond mitigation. States must cooperate internationally, provide financial and technical assistance to vulnerable nations, and ensure their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) reflect the highest possible ambition. Failure to act could constitute an internationally wrongful act, triggering State responsibility and potential reparations. The Court also recognised the special circumstances of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), affirming that equity and differentiated responsibilities require enhanced support for those most at risk. This opinion transforms climate action from a matter of policy choice into a legal imperative, reshaping global and regional governance frameworks.

## **Implications for CARICOM**

For CARICOM, this amounts to a game-changer. Article 65 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas which was largely symbolic, now aligns with an enforceable global legal standard. Article 65 commits CARICOM to 'protect, preserve, and manage the environment' for sustainable development. Yet, CARICOM's regional institutions such as COTED and the Community Council have historically lacked teeth for enforcing environmental commitments. The ICJ Opinion's affirmative stance on due diligence and cooperation provides the missing legal foundation, but translating it into action demands institutional reform, funding mechanisms, and judicial willingness to hold States accountable across borders and within the region.

## Hurricane Melissa: Environmental Law Meets Catastrophic Impact

In late October 2025, Hurricane Melissa, a catastrophic Category 5 storm, ravaged Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and the Bahamas. With winds up to 185 mph, it claimed lives, left thousands displaced, disrupted power grids across 77% of Jamaica, destroyed 60,000+ homes in Cuba, and resulted in an estimated US\$48 billion in economic losses (Britannica, 2025).

Under the combined framework of Article 65 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas and the ICJ Advisory Opinion, Hurricane Melissa illustrates the critical intersection between legal obligations and practical action. States are required to exercise due diligence, which includes implementing early warning systems, strengthening infrastructure resilience, and ensuring disaster preparedness to mitigate foreseeable harm. Equally important is the duty of cooperation, where coordinated emergency responses among Caribbean nations can significantly reduce the human and economic toll of climate-related disasters.



An aerial view of Black River, Jamaica, Thursday, Oct. 30, 2025, in the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa.  
[\(AP Photo/Matias Delacroix\)](#)

The ICJ Advisory Opinion is timely because Hurricane Melissa has underscored the existential threat climate change poses to SIDS. Melissa's intensity and catastrophic damage were fuelled by warming seas, precisely the kind of climate-driven phenomenon the ICJ warned that States must act to prevent.

By affirming that climate obligations are legal and enforceable, the Opinion arrives at a moment when the Caribbean is grappling with the real-world consequences of inadequate preparedness and cooperation. It signals that failure to implement robust mitigation and adaptation measures is no longer just a policy gap, it could amount to an internationally wrongful act, making urgent, coordinated action a legal necessity for CARICOM and other vulnerable regions.

## **Conclusion**

CARICOM's 2024 Heads of Government climate declaration echoed Vanuatu's leadership in prompting the ICJ Opinion. Now the challenge is bridging political will with binding legal frameworks that deliver real-world impact. The ICJ Opinion makes denial untenable, but implementation requires bold institutional resolve, matched by robust legal mechanisms and regional solidarity (United Nations, 2025).

Caribbean leaders must not repeat the mistake of action without legal bite. The challenge ahead is not just storms but standing up to deliver legally rooted climate resilience. As Vanuatu triggered the ICJ's legal awakening for SIDS, CARICOM must now make that awakening practical, translating global legal authority into regional protection, responsibility, and climate justice.

# Judicial Wellbeing: For Whom, How and Why? Democratic Approaches

**Peter Jamadar, Judge, CCJ and Chair, CAJO**

In July 2025 the global judicial community celebrated the inaugural 'International Day for Judicial Wellbeing'. This followed several international research-based initiatives, including Caribbean based research, into and reflections on the relationships between wellbeing, judicial performance, and integrity. This research and these reflections culminated in 2024, firstly, in the July adoption of the 'Nauru Declaration on Judicial Well-being', and secondly, in the November promulgation of the 'Bermuda CAJO Statement on the Wellbeing of Judicial Officers and Judiciary Staff'. Caribbean actors were at the centre of all of these developments.

In August 2025, the global judicial community, embraced by these Pacific and Caribbean-led insights, convened the inaugural 'International Judicial Conference on Integrity and Judicial Well-being', which was held in Papua New Guinea. It was an outstanding success. One concrete outcome is the preparation of a commentary on the core principles in the Nauru Declaration. Here also there were significant Caribbean representations and participation.

A lot has happened in a relatively short space of time!

In Bettering Justice's first post in July 2023, we asserted some key ideas and values that informed the *raison d'être* for the creation of this Bettering Justice platform. Among other things, we asserted the following:

- A legal system is a living holistic human system. ... Because it is holistic, every part and aspect of it matters and is of value.
- Justice is always and forever aspirational. Justice systems are correspondingly forever in a state of catching-up, in need of being made better.

- At present we ground our approaches to Bettering Justice in certain key values - **democracy, equality, dignity, fairness, diversity, and inclusivity.**

These Bettering Justice ideas and values impact how we must understand and accommodate judicial wellbeing. Especially as world acceptance gushes out in its recognition and in the roll-out of initiatives intended to facilitate it.

There can be little doubt that: (i) the performance of individual persons is directly dependent on the state of their physical, emotional, mental, psychological, and social wellbeing; (ii) since judiciaries work and function in interdependent and intersecting departments, units, and teams, optimal interrelationships are also integral to wellbeing and performance; and (iii) in as much as judiciaries are also organic and complex human systems – dependent of the exercise of human agency for performance, the nature and status of institutional systems and cultures are also linked to wellbeing and performance.

Further, because judiciaries are subject to internal and external pressures, some of which can directly threaten the rule of law and undermine core ethical principles (such as independence, impartiality, integrity, propriety, diligence), judicial resilience is a critical competence. Judicial wellbeing also strengthens judicial resilience. **In short, wellbeing is intrinsic and integral to judicial and judiciary integrity and performance.**

However, the underpinning values that inform Bettering Justice demand that we take an approach to justice which is truly democratic and inclusive, in which the dignity of all persons in the justice sector are equally important. This approach must also be applied to judicial wellbeing. Judicial wellbeing cannot be limited to or disproportionately accommodate judicial officers only.

Once it is appreciated that an effective, efficient, competent, and diligent judicial system is not singularly dependent on the performance of judicial officers, but necessarily includes the performance of all court administrators and judiciary staff, the sphere of concern for judicial wellbeing widens inclusively.

Furthermore, applying this democratic and inclusive model of justice will extend its reach of judicial wellbeing not only to the lived experience of judicial officers, court administrators, and court staff, but also and critically so, to court users and other significant participants such as attorneys, expert witnesses, jurors and the like.

This results in a consequential concern and caring for the wellbeing of all who fall within the spheres of justice systems. Such a democratic and inclusive model, which has equal regard for the dignity of everyone that the system touches, will more likely promote wider affirmations of public trust and confidence in the administration of justice. This particularly because, one of the most, if not the most, important constituents, court users, are included.

## **Plural Approaches**

What is judicial wellbeing? Here the Bettering Justice value of diversity is particularly apt. The short point is that when we think about wellbeing, we have to be careful that we don't allow a 'one size fits all' approach to dictate understanding, insights, and interventions.

Wellbeing is a cultural and experiential construct. It is historically, socially, and even geographically, contextual. It, therefore, is more likely multi-polar (and not uni-polar). Further, even if/when there are overlaps in the constitutive components of wellbeing, hierarchies of value and salience may exist. For different peoples and cultures, the questions to consider therefore include: What does it mean to flourish? What does the 'good life' mean, feel, and look like? What are the hierarchies of value and salience that inform experiences of wellbeing?

What the answers to these questions may be for, say, Western peoples, may be quite different to those for the peoples from the Global South, or from the Global East. And when we add cultural, ethnic, religious, and sociological considerations, the multi-polar implications for wellbeing may be even more nuanced. In fact, there are likely also economic, ideological, and socio-political factors – for example, are the needs and indicators of wellbeing different for, say, post-colonial peoples when compared to those who have held and hold power over others?

These are important questions, because seemingly benign and research based 'holistic' models of wellbeing may gloss over or miss these differences and/or nuances. Why? Because the frameworks for research and its references may themselves be biased. Who has done the research, what were the research questions, and who were the target audiences, can all colour responsibility and the value of collected data. Indeed, we have found this to be true in our Caribbean-based research on procedural fairness.

## **Prioritisation**

There can be no doubt that judicial wellbeing must be prioritised. This is self-evident. Judicial integrity and performance, and judicial resilience, are enhanced with optimal judicial wellbeing. There ought also to be no resistance to accepting that judicial wellbeing must also be inclusive.

However, in times of scarce and/or limited resources, what and who should be prioritised? Here the Bettering Justice value of equality, as substantive equality (equity), is particularly apt.

Substantive equality focuses on achieving fair/just outcomes for all people by recognising different needs and circumstances, rather than just treating everyone the same (which is formal equality). This approach requires prioritisations and accommodations to address existing disadvantages and to ensure that all groups can enjoy the fulness of their rights and freedoms equally with all others.

In the context of judicial wellbeing, and given the democratic and inclusive approach suggested, the question becomes: Who do we prioritise if the optimal wellbeing needs of all cannot be met at the same time? This will be a matter for each judiciary to work out for itself. However, what raising the question does, is to challenge the assumption that judicial officers are to be unquestionably privileged in addressing judicial wellbeing.

## **Conclusion**

Judicial wellbeing is integral to judicial integrity and performance. It is critical for judicial resilience. Therefore, judicial wellbeing is in service of the rule of law. Moreover, judicial wellbeing, seen through democratic and inclusive eyes and enabled as such, can enhance public trust and confidence in the administration of justice. It is a people centred approach to justice delivery. An approach that has finally, and deservedly, found its place at the centre of the judicial system.

From our Bettering Justice perspective, this focus on judicial wellbeing is welcomed. May we all be the beneficiaries.

\*This piece was first published on [www.betteringjustice.com](http://www.betteringjustice.com)

# Appointments and Retirements Across the Region

## CCJ

The Honourable Mr Justice Winston Anderson was sworn in as the fourth President of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) on July 06, 2025.

Mr Justice Anderson is a citizen of Jamaica and Barbados. He obtained his Bachelor of Laws in 1983 from The University of the West Indies (The UWI). In 1984, he proceeded on the Commonwealth and Chevening Scholarships to Cambridge University, England and graduated in 1988 with a Doctorate in Philosophy majoring in International and Environmental Law. Also, in 1988, he was called to the Bar of England and Wales, as a Barrister of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn and was called to the Bar of Barbados in 1989. Mr. Justice Anderson rejoined The UWI's Faculty of Law as a lecturer in 1988 until 2003. During his tenure he served as Deputy Dean, Head of the Teaching Department of Law, and UWI Senior Lecturer in Law.

On 15 June 2010, Mr. Justice Anderson was sworn in as Judge of the Caribbean Court of Justice and is very active in the fields of judicial education and judicial reform. He is currently Chairman of the CCJ Academy for Law. The decision to appoint Mr Justice Anderson was made at the 48th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM held in Barbados from 19-21 February 2025 with the Heads accepting the recommendation submitted by the Regional and Judicial Legal Services Commission (RJLSC). The RJLSC is an independent body responsible for the hiring, disciplining, and setting of employment terms and conditions for Court staff and Judges. In terms of the President of the Court, it submits a recommendation to the Heads of Government who then vote to select the President.

A successful candidate must receive three-quarters majority vote. Mr Justice Anderson was selected after a competitive process in which applications were received from six males and one female candidate from various Commonwealth states including Barbados, Botswana, Jamaica/Barbados, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka.

Speaking of the selection, immediate past President of the CCJ, Justice Adrian Saunders congratulated Mr Justice Anderson stating, "Justice Anderson's wealth of experience, intellectual rigour, and dedication to the rule of law have significantly contributed to the development of the Court's jurisprudence. His leadership will undoubtedly strengthen the CCJ's commitment to delivering justice of the highest standard and furthering its mission to serve the region with independence, fairness, and integrity.



Justice Anderson being sworn-in as President of the CCJ

## **GUYANA**

### **Appointment of Justices of Appeal**

In 2025, the Judiciary of Guyana strengthened its appellate system with the appointment of seven new Justices of Appeal, marking a historic expansion of the Court of Appeal. Five of the appointees — Justices Navindra Singh, Nareshwar Harnanan, Priya Sewnarine-Beharry, Jo-Ann Barlow, and Ms. Joycelin Kyte-Thomas — were sworn in on 21 May 2025. Justice Damone Younge and Mr. Rafiq Khan SC — are scheduled to take the oath at a later date.

These appointments follow amendments to the Court of Appeal Act, which increased the maximum number of judges from five to eleven, to address increasing caseloads in order to improve the efficiency of appellate proceedings. The expansion enhances the Court's capacity to manage appeals effectively, contributing to timely and fair delivery of justice across Guyana.

### **Retirement of the Hon. Acting Chancellor Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards, OR, CCH**

The year 2025 marked the retirement of the Hon. Chancellor (ag.) Justice Yonette Cummings- Edwards, OR, CCH, whose distinguished legal career spanned more than four decades and contributed significantly to the strengthening and modernisation of the Judiciary. Her tenure was defined by principled leadership, a commitment to justice, and an unwavering focus on improving access, efficiency, and public confidence in the court system. She continually advocated enhancing access to justice, extending the Judiciary's influence by extending court services to many rural and interior communities, and implementing initiatives aimed at guaranteeing that everyone—irrespective of their location or situation—could receive timely and fair justice.

Chancellor (ag) Cummings-Edwards proceeded on pre-retirement leave effective 27 October 2025, concluding her service after years of sustained institutional development and reform.

Under her guidance, the Judiciary advanced critical initiatives such as the expansion of specialised courts, improvements in case management, continued digital transformation, and the enhancement of services for vulnerable groups, including children, survivors of violence, and persons with disabilities.

Her stewardship also prioritised capacity building, ensuring ongoing professional development for judicial officers and staff and fostering a culture of continuous learning and ethical practice. Her influence is evident in the strengthened governance frameworks, standardised procedures, and improved court performance systems that now support the Judiciary's day-to-day operations.

The Judiciary acknowledges her long and exemplary service and recognises the enduring impact of her contributions. The foundation established during her tenure will continue to guide ongoing improvements and reinforce the Judiciary's commitment to providing accessible, efficient, and people-centred justice across Guyana.



The Former Chancellor of the Judiciary (ag.), Hon. Madam Justice Yonette Cummings- Edwards, OR,

## **Assumption of Duty — Acting Chancellor Roxane George, OR, SC and Acting Chief Justice Navindra Singh**

In 2025, the Judiciary underwent a transition in its senior leadership while safeguarding continuity in the administration of justice. During the period when the Hon. Acting Chancellor Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards, OR, CCH, was on annual leave, the Hon. Justice Roxane George, OR, SC, Acting Chief Justice, was sworn in on 4 August 2025 to perform the duties of Acting Chancellor. At the same ceremony, the Hon. Justice Navindra Singh was sworn in to perform the duties of Acting Chief Justice.

Chancellor Cummings-Edwards shortly thereafter proceeded on pre-retirement leave effective 27 October 2025, marking the formal commencement of her retirement process. With her transition into pre-retirement, the Honourable Justices George and, OR, SC, Singh continued to act in the respective offices of Chancellor and Chief Justice.



His Excellency, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, Dr Irfaan Ali swore in Justice Roxanne George as acting Chancellor of the Judiciary and Justice Navindra Singh as acting Chief Justice on August 4, 2025.

## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

### **Retirement of Justice Ivor Archie, ORTT as Chief Justice and Appointment of the Hon Mr Justice Ronnie Boodoosinhg**

Justice Ivor Archie, ORTT, retired from his role as Chief Justice of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on October 22, 2025.

Justice Archie holds the distinction of being the youngest person to become Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago, having been appointed, the country's eighth Chief Justice at the age of 47 in 2008.

He graduated from the Hugh Wooding Law School in Trinidad in 1986 where he received the award for the most outstanding performance during the two-year programme and began his legal career in private practice with a reputable firm. Thereafter, Justice Archie spent a significant part of his legal career in the service of the Governments of Trinidad and Tobago, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the Cayman Islands in the northern Caribbean. In the Cayman Islands, he served first as Crown Counsel and Senior Crown Counsel from 1990 to 1995, and then as Solicitor General from 1995 to 1998. He also acted as that territory's Attorney General on a number of occasions. In 1998, he was elevated to the High Court Bench of Trinidad and Tobago and then to the Court of Appeal in 2004.

During his time as Chief Justice, Justice Archie was also President of the Court of Appeal of Trinidad and Tobago and the Trinidad and Tobago Judicial Education Institute, and Chairman of the Judicial and Legal Services Commission, the body responsible for selection of persons to serve on the Bench.

The Honourable Mr. Justice Ronnie Boodoosingh was appointed Chief Justice of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago by His Excellency Wade Mark, Acting President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, at the President's House, Port of Spain on October 22nd, 2025.

The Honourable the Chief Justice, Mr. Justice Ronnie Boodoosingh was admitted to legal practice in October 1992. He is an honours graduate of the University of the West Indies and the Sir Hugh Wooding Law School.

Mr. Justice Boodoosingh has served as a Course Director at the Hugh Wooding Law School since 2001 while maintaining private practice in both civil and criminal law. He has worked in both arenas and rose to the position of Senior State Counsel in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. He previously served as a member of the Disciplinary Committee of the Law Association and as National Coordinator of the Access to Justice Project of the Organisation of Commonwealth Caribbean Bar Associations.

In September 2007, Mr. Justice Boodoosingh was appointed Puisne Judge of the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago, where he presided in both the Criminal and Civil Courts. After thirteen years of distinguished service on the Bench, he was elevated to the Court of Appeal on September 14, 2020.

Mr. Justice Boodoosingh has extensive experience as a lecturer and trainer in law across a range of organisations. He has authored and co-authored several publications, including *The Complete Advocate*, *Advocacy in Point Form*, the *Law Made Simple* column in the *Guardian* newspapers, and *Ethics and Advice for Advocates*.

In addition to his achievements on the Bench, he holds a Master of Laws (LL. M.) degree with Merit in International Dispute Resolution from the University of London. He is also certified as an Adult Education Trainer by the University of the West Indies, an Advocacy Trainer by Gray's Inn, and a Judicial Education Trainer by University College London.



From L to R: Former Chief Justice, Justice Ivor Archie, ORTT, newly sworn-in Chief Justice, Justice Ronnie Boodoosinh, and Acting President, His Excellency Mr Wade Mark

Mr. Justice Boodoosinh has designed and conducted numerous training programmes for a wide range of professionals, including lawyers, law students, police officers, immigration officers, court personnel, and educators. Through these initiatives, he has contributed significantly to the professional development of justice sector stakeholders locally and across the region.

He has lectured at the Hugh Wooding Law School for over 24 years, during which he served as Director of the Trial Advocacy Programme and taught courses in Ethics, among others. He also founded the Human Rights Law Clinic, which provides practical training and advocacy opportunities for students in the area of human rights.



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