

A SPOTLIGHT ON GUYANA



CONTENTS

Message from the Management Committee	3
A Look Into the Judiciary of Guyana	5
Highlights From The Judiciary of Guyana	9
Small Jurisdiction, Smart Reform: Barbados and Judicial Modernisation	12
Joint Court of Justice of Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, and of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba Welcomes New President	17
Guyana Judiciary Strengthened With New Appointments	20
Highlights from the Judiciary of The Bahamas	27
Enhanced Judgment Delivery Communications at the CCJ	30
El Niño: What Does It Mean for Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS)?	33
Institutional Developments at the Judiciary of Guyana	38
When Logs Become Bridges	41

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MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

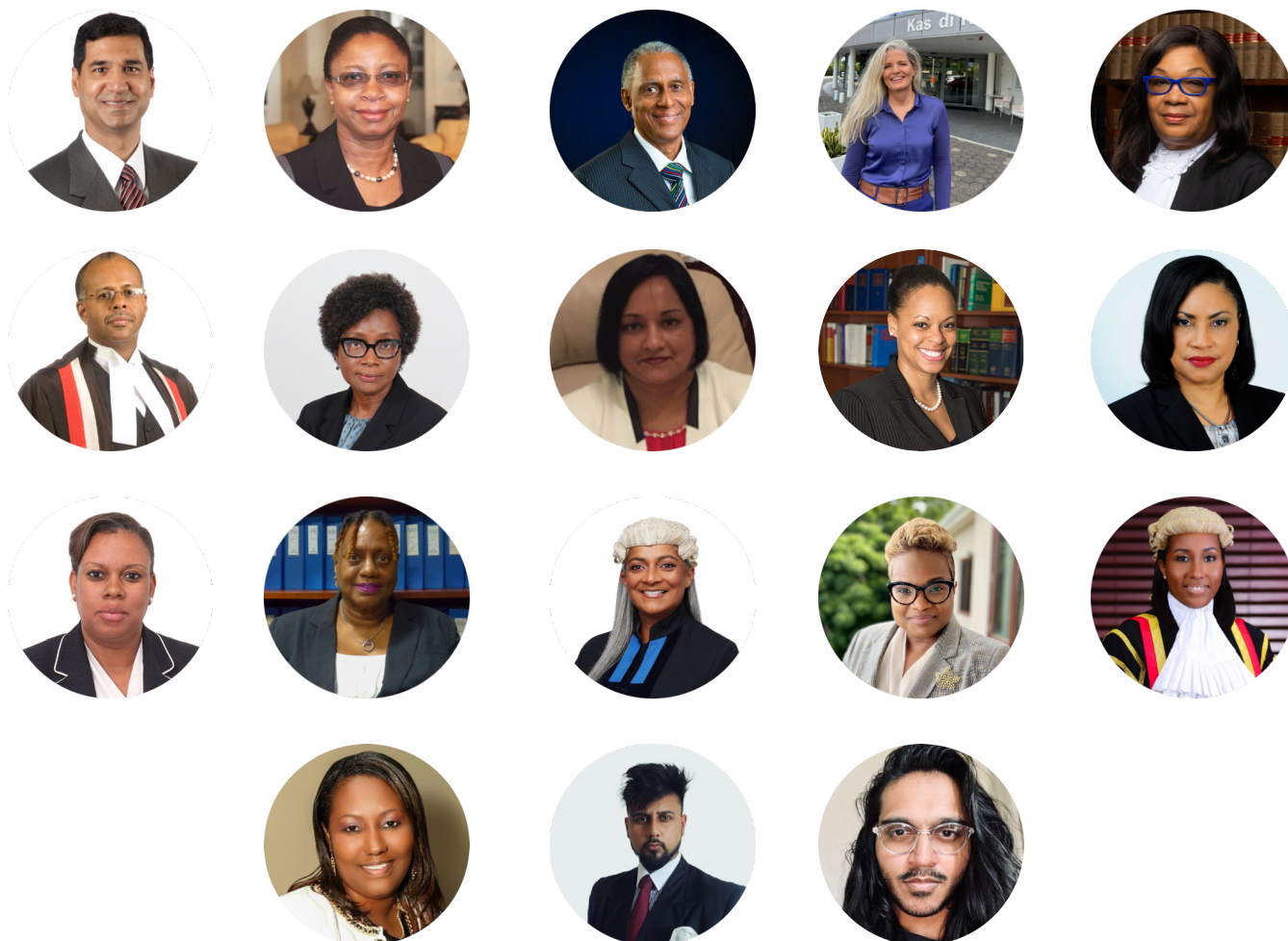
We at the CAJO are happy to spotlight Guyana in this Issue of CAJO News as we look forward to our 9th Biennial Conference in Georgetown later this year. The rich legal and judicial traditions that the Judiciary of Guyana has built, and which it continues to cultivate, will inspire us all when we meet in November.

The lead-up to the Conference has been nothing short of demanding but the CAJO's work continues to develop and make significant impact. Our Mentorship programme has been flourishing and continues to provide meaningful and helpful support to both mentees and mentors. As well, the Judiciary of The Bahamas recently launched its first ever Criminal Bench Book which the CAJO played a key role in developing and finalising. Member sessions such as CAJO Conversations, and our Law and Logic Series also took place, and the outputs have shaped some of what we will explore in the Conference; a true reflection of the deep connectivity and intentionality of what the CAJO offers to regional judicial officers.

Work across the region also continues as highlighted in this Issue. In The Bahamas, the development of a judicial complex is underway, and we look forward to infrastructure that will continue to ensure the fair and efficient delivery of justice. In Barbados, modernisation efforts are in full stride as the Judiciary leverages technology to improve the court's work. At the CCJ, the delivery of court judgments has been advanced to build court user and public engagement. And, of course, in Guyana, the development of court staff remains a core focus to ensure that services offered are strengthened.

As we continue preparation for the Conference, the 2024/2026 Management Committee of the CAJO extends its sincerest appreciation to the region as its tenure has been marked by success across the CAJO's mandate of providing regional judicial education, research, and publications interventions and opportunities.

When we meet in Guyana in November, we will welcome a new Management Committee which will continue this meaningful and important work. The Management Committee also wishes to express its special thanks to CAJO's Support Officers: Elron Elahie, Candace Simmons-Peters, and Suraj Sakal for their unwavering dedication, professionalism, and tireless efforts in supporting the work of the Association. Their commitment has been instrumental to the successful delivery of CAJO's programmes and initiatives throughout this term.



A LOOK INTO THE JUDICIARY OF GUYANA



The Judiciary of Guyana is headed by the Hon. Madam Justice Roxane George, CCH, SC, Acting Chancellor. The Acting Chancellor is supported by the Acting Chief Justice and performing those functions is the Hon. Mr. Justice Navindra Singh. Acting Chancellor George and Acting Chief Justice Singh were sworn in on 4 August 2025 consequent on Acting Chancellor Yonette Cummings-Edwards proceeding on pre-retirement leave with effect from 20 July 2025. Acting Chancellor Cummings-Edwards retired with effect from 1 April 2026.

The Judiciary of Guyana currently comprises ten Justices of Appeal including the Acting Chancellor, as President of the Court, and the Acting Chief Justice. The High Court has the full complement of twenty Puisne Judges and six Commissioners of Title who preside over the Land Courts, under the leadership of the Acting Chief Justice. There are also twenty-five members of the Magistracy, including the Chief Magistrate, out of a complement of thirty.



His Excellency, Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana with Hon Mme Justice Roxane George, CCH, SC, Acting Chancellor of the Judiciary and Hon Mr Justice Navindra Singh, Acting Chief Justice, on 04 August 2025.

Historical Context of the Judiciary of Guyana

Guyana's judicial system has evolved over several centuries, reflecting influences from Dutch and British colonial administration and later developments after Independence in 1966. The foundations of the legal system were established during the Dutch colonial period which commenced with trading posts and settlements in Essequibo between 1580 to 1745, and the colonisation of Berbice in 1627 and Demerara in 1752.

The British assumed control of Essequibo, Berbice and Demerara in 1796, and after briefly regaining some control along with the French, the Dutch finally ceded the three colonies to the British in 1814. These colonies were officially unified to become British Guiana in 1831.

These colonies were officially unified to become British Guiana in 1831. Following this unification, both Dutch and English legal systems applied until the passage of the Civil Law of Guyana Act 1917 which codified portions of Roman-Dutch law and substituted English common law and principles of equity along with English statutory provisions for the Roman-Dutch law.

Roman-Dutch law continues to influence certain aspects of Guyanese jurisprudence, especially in relation to land ownership which provides for titles to land, called transports, mortgages as judgments against properties, and declarations of title, as well as divorce.

The modern Judiciary emerged through a series of legislative reforms that continued the established High Court (then called the Supreme Court) and created the appellate Full Court of the High Court and the Court of Appeal in 1915. Appeals were later heard by the West Indian Court of Appeal, the first regional appellate court which was established in 1919.



Opening on 24 May 1887 during Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, the Queen Victoria Law Courts served as the seat for Guyana's High Court over a century. Despite expansions and modernisation, this historic building remains a prominent symbol of the nation's judicial heritage.

The Court of Appeal and the High Court are superior courts which, pursuant to the Constitution of Guyana, now comprise the Supreme Court of Judicature. On becoming a Republic in 1970, Guyana abolished appeals to the Privy Council and assumed responsibility for its own appellate system with the Court of Appeal being the final appellate court. Then, as part of the movement towards the establishment of a final regional appellate court, in 2005 Guyana joined the Caribbean Court of Justice which is now the nation's apex court.

The Land Court is presided over by Commissioners of Title, who are also called Judges of the Land Court. They have adjudicated matters for the registration of title to land under the Torrens or Land Registry system since 1959, and for declarations of title by prescription since 1965. The Magistracy also has deep historical roots, originating during the colonial era and has expanded to provide a service through a nationwide network of magistrates' courts including in rural and hinterland communities. Apart from civil and summary criminal matters, since 1978 Magistrates have exercised jurisdiction over the vast majority of indictable criminal matters, and serious offences such as those involving narcotics, firearms and money-laundering. In effect, this means that Guyana has had 'judge alone trials' for many matters for several years.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE JUDICIARY OF GUYANA



The Hon Mme Justice Roxane George, CCH SC, Chancellor of the Judiciary (ag), took the salute and inspected the guard of honour.

The Opening of the Law Year 2026

The fourth annual Opening of the Law Year was held on Tuesday, 13 January 2026 at the Victoria Law Courts, Georgetown, Demerara.

This year's Opening of the Law Year featured a historic Special Sitting of the Full Bench of the Supreme Court of Judicature, which was presided over by the Acting Chancellor, the Acting Chief Justice, Justices of Appeal, and Puisne Judges. The Special Sitting was preceded by the customary inspection of the guard of honour, ceremonial parade and march-past.

The Hon. Madam Justice Roxane George, CCH, SC, Acting Chancellor, took the salute and inspected the guard of honour, accompanied by Assistant Commissioner Michael Kingston, in the presence of the Hon. Mr. Justice Navindra Singh, Acting Chief Justice, Justices of Appeal, Puisne Judges, Commissioners of Title, the Registrar and Deputy Registrars of the Supreme Court of Judicature, Magistrates, the Hon. Mr. Mohabir A. Nandlall, SC, MP, Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, the Hon. Ms. Oneidge Walrond, Minister of Home Affairs, the Hon. Mr. Keoma Griffith, Minister of Labour and Manpower Planning, Mr. Kamal Ramkarran, President of the Bar Association, Judicial Research Counsel and other Attorneys-at-Law, and Court Marshals.

In her Honour's address, the Acting Chancellor recognized the stewardship of Ret'd Acting Chancellor of the Judiciary, Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards, OR, CCH. Her Honour outlined a comprehensive programme of reform to strengthen the administration of justice in Guyana. She reported on the implementation of the Judiciary's Strategic Plan 2024–2031 under the theme *"Pursuing Service Excellence through Investments in Human Resources, Management Systems and Technology"*.

The Acting Chancellor highlighted the then pending application of the Supreme Court of Judicature to become a member of the International Consortium for Court Excellence (ICCE), and initiatives to align judicial operations with the International Framework for Court Excellence (IFCE). She noted the ongoing investments in court infrastructure, and the continued development of electronic filing and case management systems for the magistrates' courts. She further noted challenges including staffing shortages, the need for legislative reform, and the importance of data-driven management. The Acting Chancellor reaffirmed her commitment *"to work humbly, respectfully, impartially and with patience and integrity"* in upholding the rule of law and ensuring the fair, transparent, and efficient delivery of justice.

The Acting Chief Justice highlighted the importance of continuing legal education for Judges and legal practitioners. He observed that structured and sustained professional development is vital for navigating complex legal matters, delivering timely and well-reasoned judgments, and maintaining public confidence in the Judiciary. He also emphasised the necessity for adherence to rigorous professional standards and the adoption of modern practices to enhance efficiency, transparency, and credibility across the justice system. The Acting Chief Justice reaffirmed the importance of collaboration between the Judiciary and justice sector stakeholders to ensure efficiency in the administration of justice.

Supreme Court of Judicature of Guyana acceptance as an ICCE Implementing Member

The Supreme Court of Judicature of Guyana was formally accepted as an Implementing Member of the ICCE on 12 February 2026. This achievement signifies a major milestone in the Judiciary's commitment to strengthening governance, institutional performance, and the delivery of justice. It reinforces the Judiciary's resolve to meet internationally recognised standards of court excellence to respond effectively to Guyana's social and economic transformation.

The Judiciary's acceptance followed an extensive internal process that began in December 2024 with preparation for the Judiciary-wide self-assessment utilising the IFCE. Between 22 July and 11 August 2025, judicial officers and staff participated in structured surveys designed to evaluate institutional performance against international standards.

The Supreme Court of Guyana joins the Caribbean Court of Justice, the Supreme Federal Court of Brazil and the Judiciary of Jamaica as regional members of the ICCE.

SMALL JURISDICTION, SMART REFORM: BARBADOS AND JUDICIAL MODERNISATION

Across the Caribbean, courts are seeking practical ways to modernise operations while maintaining public confidence, judicial independence, and effective service delivery. Barbados is approaching this challenge through a structured and evolving programme of reform focused on technology, professional development, institutional strengthening, and regional collaboration. While significant progress has been made, the Judiciary continues to take deliberate steps toward modernisation as part of an ongoing transformation agenda.



The Hon Mr Justice Leslie Haynes, F.B., Chief Justice

Guided by the shared vision of The Most Honourable Leslie Haynes, F.B., Chief Justice, and Ms. Joy-Ann Clarke, Registrar of the Supreme Court, the Judiciary and Registry continue to work collaboratively to advance a programme of modernisation designed to strengthen the administration of justice while recognising the practical realities faced by small island developing states.

Modernising Court Infrastructure

One significant step in this modernisation journey has been the upgrading of courtroom technology and court reporting infrastructure.

The Barbados court system has undertaken substantial upgrades to court reporting and recording equipment, improving the reliability of court records, supporting greater operational efficiency, and enhancing the quality of courtroom proceedings.

This modernisation effort has included the implementation of the Liberty Court Recording System throughout the court system to support improved digital record management, operational consistency, and long term institutional resilience. These improvements form part of a broader strategy aimed at creating a more responsive and technologically enabled court environment.

Strengthening Institutional Independence

Beyond technological improvements, Barbados is also pursuing important institutional reforms designed to strengthen judicial independence and accountability.

A key component of this effort involves the transition of the Registry from its traditional administrative arrangements under the Attorney General's portfolio toward a model more closely aligned with that adopted by the Judiciary in The Bahamas. This proposed framework would place the administration of the Registry under the leadership of the Chief Justice through a Court Services Council structure supported by its own budgetary arrangements, further advancing the development of a fully independent Judiciary. Cabinet has approved these reforms in principle, and the transition remains a work in progress as stakeholders continue to advance the necessary legislative and administrative changes.

Investing in People and Managing Change

Recognising that sustainable reform requires investment in people as well as systems, the Judiciary continues to facilitate training initiatives involving judicial officers, registry staff, court support personnel, and members of the Bar.

Introductory and operational training sessions have been conducted to support the successful adoption of upgraded technologies, enhance user confidence, and strengthen institutional readiness for digital transformation.

Equally important is the need for effective change management and staff engagement. The Judiciary recognises that modernisation requires not only new systems and processes but also the commitment and support of those responsible for implementing them. Securing organisational buy in remains a critical component of the transformation process, requiring the wherewithal to manage change through a nuanced yet robust approach.

The Judiciary continues to work toward fostering a shared vision for the future of the courts and cultivating the renewed energy necessary to support meaningful and lasting reform.

Advancing Digital Justice

The Barbados Judiciary also continues to pursue broader digital justice initiatives through efforts involving JIMS, CURIA integration, and the digitisation of court and registry operations. These projects form part of wider objectives to improve efficiency, strengthen interoperability, reduce administrative burdens, and support the long-term modernisation of justice sector services.

Work is also underway to enhance the capabilities of the CURIA platform, including functionality to support the weighting, allocation, and assignment of cases. These enhancements are intended to strengthen case management processes, promote greater efficiency in the distribution of judicial work, and support the effective administration of justice.

Complementing these technological improvements is a renewed emphasis on case flow management and judicial efficiency. Over the past two years, the Judiciary has benefited from specialised training and capacity building initiatives in case flow management facilitated by The Honourable Justice of Appeal Charmaine Pemberton, JA, of the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago.

Through workshops, practical exercises, and strategic discussions, judicial officers and court administrators have been equipped with tools and methodologies designed to improve case progression, reduce delays, strengthen scheduling practices, and support more effective court administration. These initiatives form an important component of the Judiciary's broader efforts to enhance efficiency, strengthen service delivery, and foster a culture of continuous improvement throughout the court system.

Regional Collaboration Through JUSTconnect

An important component of this modernisation agenda has been the expansion of judicial education and regional collaboration through JUSTconnect. The platform provides opportunities for virtual judicial training, regional dialogue, and continuous professional development.

Barbados continues to actively engage with JUSTconnect initiatives, including participation in the inaugural regional judicial webinar hosted through the platform in March 2026. This engagement reflects the Judiciary's commitment to strengthening Caribbean judicial cooperation, promoting knowledge sharing, supporting continuous professional development, and fostering a culture of lifelong learning among judicial officers throughout the region.

Improving Public Accessibility

Alongside technological reform, the Judiciary continues to emphasise public accessibility and communications modernisation. Current initiatives include the rebranding of the Judiciary's public identity and the redesign of its website to improve accessibility, user experience, transparency, and public engagement.

These efforts seek to provide court users and stakeholders with more intuitive access to information and services while strengthening public confidence in the administration of justice.

Looking Ahead

The Barbados experience demonstrates that meaningful judicial modernisation is not solely dependent on the scale of available resources. For small jurisdictions, sustainable progress can be achieved through strategic planning, investment in people, regional collaboration, and the thoughtful application of technology.

As this transformation continues, the Judiciary is working to foster a renewed vision for the future trajectory of the courts, one fuelled by innovation, strengthened institutional capacity, effective case flow management, professional development, and a reinvigorated commitment to excellence in the administration of justice. Equally important is the successful management of change and the cultivation of staff engagement across all levels of the organisation.

While many initiatives remain works in progress, the modernisation journey underway in Barbados reflects a deliberate and sustained effort to build a more efficient, accessible, resilient, and independent Judiciary for future generations.

JOINT COURT OF JUSTICE OF ARUBA, CURAÇAO, SINT MAARTEN, AND OF BONAIRE, SINT EUSTATIUS AND SABA WELCOMES NEW PRESIDENT



Sigmar Carmelia being sworn in as the new President of the Joint Court of Justice during a ceremony led by the Governor of Curaçao, Mauritsz de Kort

On Tuesday, May 12, 2026, Mr. Sigmar Carmelia was officially sworn in as President of the Joint Court of Justice of Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. He took the oath of office before the Governor of Curaçao, Mauritsz de Kort, during a formal ceremony held in Willemstad. The event marked a significant milestone in the judicial history of the Dutch Caribbean, as the sitting Governor, himself a former President of the Joint Court of Justice, formally administered the oath to his successor. This highlighted a rare continuity of leadership within the Kingdom's legal system.

During the ceremony, a special symbolic moment took place when the gavel of the Joint Court of Justice was presented to Mr. Carmelia by his two daughters. This personal and meaningful gesture marked the assumption of his new office in a memorable way.

With the appointment of Mr. Carmelia, the Court enters a new chapter under the leadership of a jurist who was born and raised in Curaçao. His personal and professional background reflects a deep connection to the island and the wider Caribbean legal community.

After completing his secondary education at the Radulphus College, Mr. Carmelia pursued legal studies at the University of the Netherlands Antilles before continuing his academic journey at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. His education provided him with a solid foundation in both local and European legal traditions.

Following his graduation, he began his professional career as a legal officer at the Equal Treatment Commission in Utrecht, the Netherlands, where he worked on issues related to equality and anti-discrimination law. In 2004, he returned to Curaçao and joined the law firm of Mr. Ornelio “Kid” Martina as an attorney-at-law. During this period, he gained extensive courtroom experience in a wide range of civil and criminal cases, which would later prove invaluable to his development as a judge.

In 2012, Mr. Carmelia commenced his judicial training, which he successfully completed in 2014. As part of his final traineeship, he served at the District Court of Gelderland in Arnhem, in the Netherlands, gaining valuable experience within the Dutch judicial system. In 2015, he was appointed as a judge of the Joint Court of Justice.

Since his appointment, Mr. Carmelia has served in various divisions of the Court, contributing to both first-instance and appellate proceedings. He has also fulfilled additional responsibilities, including serving as a press judge and representing the Court in its communications with the public and the media.

With his extensive background in both legal practice and judiciary, Mr. Carmelia brings a combination of expertise, institutional knowledge, and regional understanding to his new role. His appointment is expected to further strengthen the Court's mission of delivering independent, accessible, and high-quality justice throughout the Dutch Caribbean.

In his new role as President, he is expected to focus on enhancing judicial efficiency, strengthening cooperation between the different islands, and continuing the modernization of court procedures. He has also emphasized the importance of maintaining public trust, safeguarding judicial independence, and ensuring that justice remains accessible to all citizens across the region. Furthermore, he is expected to continue emphasizing the strengthening of cooperation between the Caribbean islands, intensify collaboration with other international courts. By fostering closer regional collaboration and strengthening ties with international judicial networks, he aims to promote the exchange of knowledge, best practices, and expertise.

The swearing-in ceremony was attended by representatives from across the judiciary, the legal community, and the government, reflecting the importance of the occasion for the entire Dutch Caribbean legal order.

Mr. Carmelia's appointment is widely seen as a symbol of both continuity and renewal, underscoring the Court's evolving role in a changing legal landscape while maintaining its core values of integrity, independence, and public service.



GUYANA JUDICIARY STRENGTHENED WITH NEW APPOINTMENTS

Two Justice of Appeal, six Puisne Judges, five Commissioners of Title, the Chief Magistrate, six Magistrates and a Deputy Registrar were recently appointed consequent on their recommendation to His Excellency the President, or appointment by the Judicial Service Commission (JSC).

Court of Appeal

The Hon. Mr. Justice Rafiq Khan, SC, was appointed a Justice of Appeal on 22 December 2025. He was admitted to practise in Guyana in 1984 after graduating from the University of the West Indies and obtaining his Legal Education Certificate from the Norman Manley Law School in Jamaica.



The Hon Mr Justice Rafiq Khan, SC,
Justice of Appeal

He joined the firm of Cameron & Shepherd in 1984 and became a Partner in 1986. Widely recognised for his work in Intellectual Property, Civil Litigation, Banking and Commercial Law, and Conveyancing, he also served on the Legal Practitioners Committee and the Rules Committee responsible for revising the Rules of the High Court. Justice Khan previously acted as a Justice of Appeal in 2018. He was also a lecturer in Contract Law and Equitable Remedies at the University of Guyana.

The Hon. Madam Justice **Damone F. J. Younge** was appointed a Justice of Appeal on 14 April 2026. She graduated from the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados in 1999, and obtained her Legal Education Certificate from the Hugh Wooding Law School in 2001. She served for 16 years in the Attorney General's Chambers and Ministry of Legal Affairs in several senior legal and policy positions before being appointed a Puisne Judge in July 2017. During this period, she presided in both civil and criminal jurisdictions across the three counties of Demerara, Berbice, and Essequibo, including extensive service in the Family Division. She also serves as Vice President of the Guyana Association of Women Judges.



The Hon Mme Justice Damone F. J.
Younge, Justice of Appeal

High Court

The Judiciary welcomed six Puisne Judges following the recommendation of their appointment by the JSC and the administration of the Oath of Office before His Excellency, Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, on 1 July 2026. The appointees—Justices Sueanna Lovell, Azeena Baksh, Renita Singh, Christel Lambert-Meertins, Sunil Scarce and Mandisa Breedy bring extensive experience in judicial service, legal practice and public administration, further strengthening the High Court Bench.

To support their transition to the Bench, the newly appointed judges participated in a comprehensive five-day Orientation Programme hosted by the Judicial Education Institute–Guyana (JEI-G) under the theme "*Ensuring efficient, effective, ethical adjudication.*" The programme covered the judicial environment and protocol, ethics and conduct, judgment writing, criminal and civil case management, courtroom administration, human rights, the Judiciary's Strategic Plan, the E-Litigation Portal, judicial wellness, and relationships with key justice sector agencies. Participants also observed court proceedings and visited the Lusignan Prison as part of their practical orientation.



His Excellency, Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the newly appointed Puisne Judges

Land Court

The Judiciary also welcomed five Commissioners of Title, Ms. Alicia Lowenfield, Ms. Annette Singh, Ms. Alisha George, Ms. Shivani Lalaram and Ms. Uteika John, who were sworn in by Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Phillips, Prime Minister, on 15 July 2026 consequent on their appointment by the JSC. The appointees bring to their new post many years of experience as magistrates and as an attorney-at-law in the case of Ms. John.

Magistrates' Court

In addition, six new Magistrates were sworn in: Ms. Ocelisa Marks, Ms. Nikkisha Logan, Ms. Jimelle Joseph, Ms. Shareefah Parks, Ms. Taneisha Saygon and Ms. Caressa Henry, on 15 July 2026 by Prime Minister Phillips consequent upon their appointment by the JSC. The JSC announced that Her Worship Ms. Judy Latchman was appointed to the post of Chief Magistrate with effect from January 2025. She was appointed a magistrate in 2009 and promoted to Principal Magistrate in 2017. The other appointees have many years of experience as state counsel in the Chambers of the Director of Public Prosecutions and as counsel in the public and private sectors.



Hon. Prime Minister Brigadier (ret'd) Mark Phillips, Hon. Justice Roxane George Chancellor (ag), Hon. Mr. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Hon. Justice Navindra Singh, Chief Justice (ag), Ms. Judy Latchman, Chief Magistrate, newly appointed COTs and newly appointed Magistrates



Ms Collene Liverpool

Deputy Registrar

The JSC appointed Ms. Collene Liverpool to the post of Deputy Registrar. Ms. Liverpool is performing the functions of the Registrar of the Supreme Court of Judicature until further notice. She obtained a Bachelor of Laws in 2014 and a Legal Education Certificate in 2016.

She holds a Master of Laws in Corporate and Commercial Law from the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus. She gained her experience at the Chambers of the Attorney General, the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission, and One Communications (Guyana) Inc.

To aid in their transition to judicial office, the Commissioners of Title, Deputy Registrar, and the Magistrates participated in orientation programmes hosted by the JEI-G.

The CAJO looks forward to seeing you at its

9TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

Changing Fundamentals of Judging

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE JUDICIARY OF THE BAHAMAS

The past six months have been a period of growth and transition for the Judiciary of The Bahamas.

Breaking Ground on New Court Complex

On 31 March, 2026 the Chief Justice officially broke ground for the much-needed Judicial Complex. It is a landmark project expected to be completed within three years. The facility will house the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court (save for the specialized courts – Family Court, Commercial Court and Sexual Offences Court).



Sir Ian Winder, Chief Justice, at the breaking-ground ceremony. Photo courtesy [ZNS Network](#), Bahamas

Appointments and Retirements

Retirements

The following judicial officers retired from the judiciary after having served a distinguished judicial career:

- Hon. Madam Justice of Appeal Maureen Crane-Scott retired from the Court of Appeal on 2 February 2026 having served over 10 years as a Justice of Appeal in The Bahamas.
- Hon. Justice of Appeal Ms. Indra Charles retired from the Court of Appeal on 22 June 2026 having served as both a Justice of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal in The Bahamas for thirteen years.
- Acting Stipendiary and Circuit Magistrate Mr. James Moxey retired from the Magistrates Court on 10 February 2026 after having served 17 years in the Magistrates Court.

Appointments

- Hon. Justice Mr. George Gregory Hilton retired from the Supreme Court on 31 December 2025 after having served for over 10 years in the Criminal Division and was appointed a Justice of the Court of Appeal on 1 January 2026.
- Hon. Justice of Appeal Vasheist Kokaram was appointed to the Court of Appeal of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas on 3 March 2026.
- Assistant Registrar Adrienne Bellot (Acting) – joined the Supreme Court on 1 February 2026 having previously served as a Judicial Research Counsel in the Supreme Court for 2 years.

Official Launch of the Criminal Bench Book

The Bahamas Judicial Education Institute formally launched the Criminal Bench Book on 27 May, 2026 at the University of The Bahamas. President of the Caribbean Association of Judicial Officers and Justice of the Caribbean Court of Justice, the Honourable Peter Jamadar participated virtually. The Honourable Chief Justice Sir Ian R. Winder, KT distributed copies of the Book to the Attorney General, the Director of Public Prosecution and others.

The Bahamas Marks First Judge Alone Trial

In May 2026, Senior Justice Cheryl Grant Thompson presided over the first trial conducted under the Trial by Judge Alone (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2024. The defendant was convicted of indecent assault against his nine-year-old cousin and sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

This landmark case follows the passage of the legislation in March 2025, which gave defendants charged with indictable offences the right to elect trial by judge alone in the Supreme Court.

With this development, The Bahamas joins its sisters in the Caribbean in adopting judge alone trials as part of modern criminal procedure. The reform is intended to reduce delays and strengthen judicial efficiency.

ENHANCED JUDGMENT DELIVERY COMMUNICATIONS AT THE CCJ

Since its inception, the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) has remained committed to ensuring access to justice for the people of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Central to that commitment has been the Court's longstanding embrace of transparency as a means of fostering public trust and confidence in the administration of justice. The CCJ recognises that meaningful access to justice extends beyond the ability to bring matters before the Court; it also requires that the Court's jurisprudence is understood by those whom it serves. With this in mind, the Court has implemented a range of enhanced public awareness mechanisms to make its judgments more accessible, engaging, and easier to understand.

The Court's recent judgment deliveries in *Ramsamooj v The State of Suriname and the Caribbean Community* and *Barrow and Others v Financial Services Commission of Belize* demonstrate the importance of these initiatives. The *Ramsamooj* judgment represents a significant contribution to the Court's Original Jurisdiction jurisprudence, clarifying the relationship between the right to free movement under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas and the protection of fundamental human rights. The *Barrow* matter is equally significant, as it marks the first referral from a national court to the CCJ under its Original Jurisdiction. This milestone reinforces the Court's role in ensuring the uniform interpretation and application of Community law, while strengthening judicial dialogue between national courts and the CCJ.

To maximise public awareness surrounding these decisions, and all future judgment deliveries, the Court has adopted a comprehensive communications strategy that complements its judicial function while preserving its independence and impartiality.

A key aspect of this approach is the extension of viewing invitations to key stakeholders, including members of the legal profession, government officials, regional institutions, academia, civil society organisations, and the media.



Click **here** to view the CCJ's case briefing for *Ramsamooj v The State of Suriname and the Caribbean Community*

By encouraging viewership from these audiences, the Court promotes informed discussion of judgments that shape the legal landscape of CARICOM.

The Court has also introduced case briefing videos, which provide concise and accessible summaries of the issues before the Court, the legal principles considered, the Court's reasoning, and the practical implications of each decision. Going forward, these videos will precede all judgment deliveries, creating an enduring resource for legal practitioners, students, journalists, and members of the public.

Supporting the judgments are explainer graphics that present key legal principles, procedural milestones, and outcomes in clear, visually engaging formats. Designed for digital dissemination, these graphics simplify complex legal concepts and encourage broader engagement with the Court's work.

Where appropriate, as with *Ramsamooj*, the Court is also providing Dutch interpretation of live-streamed judgment deliveries and Dutch translation of written judgments, ensuring that language is not a barrier to understanding decisions of regional importance. These efforts reflect the Court's commitment to making its jurisprudence accessible to the diverse peoples of CARICOM.

Together, these enhanced communications initiatives reaffirm the CCJ's enduring commitment to access to justice, transparency, and public legal education. As we embody "One region, One people, One Court", the CCJ ensures that its judgments are not only delivered openly, but also communicated effectively to strengthen public confidence in the administration of justice and deepen understanding of the jurisprudence that shapes the CARICOM.

EL NIÑO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR CARIBBEAN SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS)?

Chelsea Dookie, Legal Officer, CCJ

The return of El Niño in 2026 is quite literally “hot” news. It is the warm phase of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO), a recurring climate pattern characterised by unusually warm sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean (World Meteorological Organization (WMO), 2026). ENSO is one of the most influential drivers of global climate volatility and occurs every two to seven years. Changes in temperatures of the Pacific Ocean alter atmospheric circulation patterns influencing rainfall, temperatures, drought conditions and tropical cyclone activity across the globe (WMO, 2026; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), 2026).

In February 2026, the WMO reported a transition towards ENSO-neutral conditions but by May and June 2026, forecasts showed a pronounced shift towards El Niño development. The WMO estimated an 80 per cent probability of El Niño conditions during June to August 2026 while NOAA has formally declared that El Niño conditions are present and are expected to strengthen through the Northern Hemisphere winter of 2026–2027 (WMO, 2026; NOAA, 2026).

Scientific forecasts indicate that the current event may become strong, with some projections suggesting that it could rank among the more significant El Niño events observed since modern records began in 1950. Nevertheless, climate scientists caution that no two El Niño events are identical and that impacts can vary considerably (WMO, 2026; NOAA, 2026).

For an in-depth explanation of El Niño, see the BBC News on YouTube: [‘How ‘super’ El Niño could bring chaos to the world’s weather.’](#)



Dry conditions during the rainy season in Trinidad

Should Caribbean SIDS be concerned about El Niño?

Although El Niño originates in the Pacific Ocean, its effects extend well beyond the Pacific basin. In an article published by The University of the West Indies Global Campus, Professor Michael Taylor, Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology at UWI and a leading Caribbean climate scientist, warned that the likelihood of El Niño conditions developing had increased significantly. He explained that El Niño is typically associated with below-average rainfall and drought across much of the Caribbean, often resulting in water shortages, reduced agricultural production, and increased pressure on already vulnerable economies.

Professor Taylor noted that the region experienced severe impacts during previous El Niño events, particularly in 2009 to 2010 and 2015 to 2016, when many Caribbean countries faced widespread drought conditions.

He emphasised the importance of early preparedness measures, including water conservation and drought management planning and urged governments and citizens to begin preparing for the potential impacts of a prolonged dry period. According to Taylor, while El Niño can reduce Atlantic hurricane activity, Caribbean states should remain vigilant because drought and water scarcity often pose equally significant threats to the region's social and economic well-being (Taylor, 2023).

Climate Change and the SIDS Challenge

The emergence of El Niño in 2026 occurs against a backdrop of accelerating climate change. While El Niño itself is a naturally occurring phenomenon, its impacts may be amplified by rising global temperatures.

SIDS are widely recognised as being on the frontlines of climate change. They face a combination of sea-level rise, coastal erosion, changing precipitation patterns, stronger climate extremes and increasing economic exposure to climate-related disasters. Studies indicate that climate hazards impose disproportionately high economic costs on SIDS, often consuming a significant share of national GDP following major events.

For Caribbean countries the challenge is not simply responding to a single El Niño event. Rather, it is strengthening resilience to an increasingly variable and uncertain climate future.



Dry and arid wetlands in southern Trinidad

The Importance of Regional Cooperation

The Caribbean has already developed important mechanisms for climate monitoring and adaptation. Institutions such as the Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology (CIMH) and the Caribbean Regional Climate Centre (CRCC) provide climate information services that support evidence-based decision-making throughout the region.

Regional cooperation remains essential because climate risks do not respect national boundaries. Shared forecasting systems, disaster preparedness initiatives, water management strategies and climate finance mechanisms can help Caribbean states address challenges that exceed the capacity of any individual country acting alone.

The 2026 El Niño also underscores the importance of continued international advocacy by SIDS. Access to climate finance, adaptation funding and resilience-building investments remain critical if vulnerable states are to manage the increasing risks associated with climate variability and climate change.

The development of El Niño conditions in 2026 is a timely reminder that climate variability remains a defining challenge for Caribbean SIDS. Climate risks are multidimensional and interconnected. As the region continues to navigate an increasingly uncertain climate future, investment in resilience, science-based policymaking and regional cooperation will be essential.

Ultimately, El Niño 2026 is not merely a weather event. It is another test of the Caribbean's capacity to adapt, prepare and thrive in a changing climate.

From a legal perspective, El Niño 2026 highlights the growing importance of climate governance and environmental law within Caribbean SIDS. Governments are required to strengthen legislative and regulatory frameworks governing water resource management, disaster risk reduction, land use planning, environmental protection, food security and climate adaptation.

Climate events associated with El Niño may also engage States' obligations under international environmental agreements, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

For Caribbean SIDS, the phenomenon underscores the legal significance of the principle of resilience-building, requiring public authorities to integrate climate risks into policy-making and development decisions. It also strengthens the case advanced by many SIDS in international fora that states most vulnerable to climate impacts should receive enhanced financial and technical support from the international community, consistent with principles of climate justice, common but differentiated responsibilities and the commitments reflected in recent international climate agreements. As climate variability intensifies, legal frameworks will play an increasingly critical role in ensuring that adaptation measures are not merely policy aspirations but enforceable mechanisms capable of safeguarding livelihoods, ecosystems, and sustainable development.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS AT THE JUDICIARY OF GUYANA

Commencement of Administrative Audit and Reengineering Exercise

In January 2026, the Judiciary of Guyana commenced a comprehensive Audit and Reengineering Exercise of its Administrative Division with support from Global Affairs Canada through the Caribbean Regional Development Program. The initiative forms part of the Judiciary's ongoing commitment to strengthening institutional efficiency and improving the delivery of justice in accordance with the implementation of the Judiciary's Strategic Plan 2024–2031.

The consultancy was designed to assess the Judiciary's current administrative, staffing, and human resource structures against its operational needs and international best practices, including the IFCE.

The exercise includes a review of the organisational structure, staffing complement, job positions, job descriptions, and salary scales across the Administrative Division, while identifying inefficiencies, staffing gaps, and operational challenges. It also seeks to provide recommendations aimed at modernising and strengthening administrative operations and service delivery throughout the Judiciary.

The consultancy is expected to produce an Audit Report, revised organisational structure and staffing proposal, a Reengineering Plan, and a Final Consolidated Report to guide future institutional development within the Judiciary.

Staff Development

The JEI-G, now chaired by Acting Chief Justice Navindra Singh, continues to play a pivotal role in the professional development of judicial officers and court staff.

During 2025 to 2026, the JEI-G facilitated and coordinated a range of training initiatives which reflect the Judiciary's ongoing commitment to strengthening capacity and supporting the effective administration of justice through continuous education.

Key training programmes included Workforce Management Training for Senior Registry Staff, delivered through the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), which focused on enhancing leadership, supervision, and workforce planning competencies. Administrative staff also benefited from training on Customer Service and Professionalism, Ethics and Professional Conduct, and Records and Registry Management.



Former Registrar, Mrs Sueanna Lovell, former Deputy Registrar, Ms. Alicia Lowenfield and participants of Judges' Registrars training held in June 2026

In addition, specialised training was conducted for Judges' Registrars, providing participants with enhanced knowledge and practical skills in judicial support functions, courtroom procedures, legal documentation, case management, and professional protocols.

There was also collaboration with the Justice Education Society, which is funded by Global Affairs Canada, in the conduct of two sessions for magistrates and judges in October 2025 and April 2026 respectively on the important topic, *"Applying a Trauma Informed, Gender and Culturally Sensitive Approach in the Application of Justice"*.

The annual Judges conference took place in July 2025 under the theme *"Judicial Excellence in an era of Economic Transformation and Technological Change"*. The Magistrates also benefited from the annual Magistrates Conference which was held in October 2025 under the theme *"Enhancing Competencies and Embracing Technological Change"*. Judges of the Supreme Court participated in UNDP and EU PACE Project sponsored training on *"Case Management in Criminal Cases"* in September 2025, and *"The Criminal Trial Process and Procedure"* in April 2026.

WHEN LOGS BECOME BRIDGES

CARICOM Secretariat

On the road from Linden to Lethem in Guyana there is a section which is referred to as "the Trail". The Trail is traversed by every manner of conveyance - from little intrepid trail motorbikes to huge 'Shacman' type trucks, to jacked up "pitbull" passenger and cargo minivans to little Toyota Premios with reinforced suspensions - in the dry season and the wet.

In times long past, many creeks along the trail were forded by driving through shallows. Later, log bridges were built, and then concrete columns and culverts became more common. But too many crossings in the rainy season were flooded, or swept away, some with vehicles in mid stream.

Now, the Government of Guyana has, in a matter of two years, built and completed an incredible 13 concrete bridges, on the Trail up to the Essequibo River running alongside Iwokrama, with adequate approaches, and flood mitigation measures.

The Trail is essential for the economic life of Guyana, linking logging and mining concessions in the hinterland, as well as Brazil, by road with Lethem, Linden and Georgetown on the Coast. It is impossible to imagine life in Guyana without the pride of red mud and dust coating vehicles and people.

In the same way, it is impossible to imagine our subregion without CARICOM. In our early days, we were like the Trail, red, rough, rocky, but there.

Born out of a short-lived union of the West Indies Federation, Commonwealth Caribbean leaders seeking a serious way to maintain regional economic and social cohesion, agreed to form a free trade area (CARIFTA) to boost intra-regional trade by removing tariffs and quotas. After some experience and much deliberation, these leaders determined that the rudimentary free trade area they created was not sufficient and agreed to transition from the simple CARIFTA formula into a formal common market and community. and the Original Treaty of Chaguaramas was born in Trinidad, on July 4, 1973.

In 1997, the signatory Member States of the Caribbean Community decided to adopt and sign the Charter of Civil Society for the Caribbean Community (the Charter). The introduction to the Charter states that ***“When the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community affixed their signatures to the Resolution adopting the Charter of Civil Society on Wednesday, February 19, 1997 in St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda, in so doing, they undertook to pay due regard to its principles”***.

The Charter was expressly stated to be non-binding; declaratory and consolidates various obligations assumed by CARICOM Member States. Those principles are directed at the peoples of the Caribbean Community.

The introduction ends stating that ***“Conscious that the common historical, cultural and social bonds of the peoples of the Caribbean Community underpin the commitment of the Governments and peoples of the Community to the Charter, and in order to achieve the objectives prescribed by the WIC, the Leaders addressed a broad spectrum of human endeavour and behaviour.”***

The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas (the RTC) promulgated in 2001, replaced the Original Treaty for all Member States except Montserrat. The RTC created the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), which provides for the free movement of people, labour, skills, goods, services, and capital.

Critically, the Charter was embedded into the preamble of the RTC, as the ultimate paragraph, ***“Recalling further the Charter of Civil Society adopted by the Conference of Heads of Government on 19 February 1997 reaffirming the human rights of their peoples.”***

In this way, the leaders of CARICOM Member States, were replacing the early fords of our community trail with log bridges to permit more and heavier traffic to pass.

The Charter extended a body of promises to the nationals of Community Member States which expressly recognize their basic human rights within the ambit of the RTC.

In 2024, Derek Anand Ramsamooj, national of Trinidad and Tobago, filed suit at the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) in its original jurisdiction after obtaining special leave against the State of Suriname.

Per the summary of the Court, Ramsamooj, a political analyst and consultant in the region, contended that he had been arbitrarily detained in Suriname without access to a court or to counsel. He argued that this amounted to a violation of his rights under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas ('RTC') to freedom of movement and to provide services.

He asserted that the rights accorded to Community nationals under the RTC are not effective without the protection of fundamental human rights, specifically those rights articulated in the Charter of Civil Society for the Caribbean Community ('the Charter')"

The facts as set out in the first paragraph of the case summary show that ***"He was denied direct access to legal counsel for two consecutive eight-day periods, on the basis of beperking orders made under art 40(2) of the Suriname Code of Criminal Procedure ('SCCP'). During that time, he was interrogated in Dutch with the use of a translator and signed a statement in Dutch which was used in court as his confession. The Claimant was held in pre-trial detention until 22 December 2020, when he was released due to the deterioration of his health.***

Formal charges of participation in a criminal organisation, fraud, forgery of invoices and money laundering were laid against him on 26 March 2021, and those charges remain pending before the trial court in Suriname. His passports were held until September 2022, when he was permitted to leave Suriname to seek medical treatment."

The Defendant state, Suriname, contended that Mr Ramsamooj ***"had failed to premise the alleged breach of his rights to freedom of movement and to provide services on discriminatory treatment on the ground of nationality only, that the Charter was non-binding, and that the Court lacked jurisdiction over alleged human rights violations."*** (Case Summary Paragraph 3)

The Defendant also asserted that ***"the restrictions imposed on the Claimant, including the restriction on his access to counsel, were justified under Article 226(1)(a) of the RTC for the protection of public morals and the maintenance of public order and safety."*** (*Ibid*)

The Court identified four key issues to be determined:

1. whether there is a minimum standard of human rights required for the effective exercise by Community nationals of their rights under the RTC, such as the right to freedom of movement and the right to provide services;
2. if there is such a minimum human rights standard under Community law, whether the operation of the *beperring* mechanism under art 40(2) of the SCCP in the circumstances of this case was consistent with the effective exercise of the Claimant's right to freedom of movement and to provide services;
3. whether the Defendant could rely on Article 226(1)(a) of the RTC to justify its use of the *beperring* mechanism; and
4. what remedies were to be awarded to the Claimant for any violations of his rights under the RTC. (*Case Summary, Paragraph 4*)

CARICOM's legal counsel as Amicus Curiae, in direct response to specific questions by the Court submitted that CARICOM citizens do possess inalienable rights arising from the Community legal order and characterized the Charter as a statement of the collective intention of Member States that their citizens should enjoy certain fundamental rights. The Charter, though not legally binding in the strict sense, reflected the shared normative commitments of CARICOM Member States.

The Court agreed. The CCJ held that ***"Community law imposes minimum human rights standards that must attend the exercise by Community nationals of their Treaty-based rights. Applying the principle of effectiveness (effet utile), the Court reasoned that the guarantees of free movement of Community nationals under the RTC would be deprived of their effectiveness if minimum human rights standards were not inferred."*** (*Case Summary Paragraph 6*)

While the Court held that ***“the Charter is neither a treaty nor a decision of the Conference of Heads of Government with binding force.”***; it stated ***“Nonetheless, the Charter has legal relevance in the Community’s legal order (i) as an aid to the interpretation of the RTC pursuant to Article 31 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, and (ii) in helping to identify general principles of Community law.”*** (Case Summary Paragraph 7)

Furthermore, the Court has decided that ***“the minimum human rights standards that must attend the exercise of Treaty-based rights, such as the right to freedom of movement, include the right of an accused person to have access to legal counsel of his or her choice, which had been entrenched in the constitutions of every CARICOM Member State and had crystallised into a regional customary standard.”*** (Case Summary Paragraph 7)

Little wonder then that the CCJ found that Mr Ramsamooj’s experience in Suriname resulted in his deprivation ***“of access to a lawyer: (i) during police or judicial interrogation; (ii) during any challenge to the beperking order itself; and (iii) during the contest of the lawfulness or continuation of detention.”*** (Case Summary Paragraph 8)

As a consequence, the Court held ***“that art 40 of the SCCP, insofar as it authorises the deprivation of access to counsel at the investigative stage without compensatory safeguards sufficient to preserve the effectiveness of the defence, unlawfully impedes free movement and cannot be reconciled with the minimum human rights baseline required by Community law.”*** (Case Summary Paragraph 8)

The State of Suriname was found to have violated the RTC freedom of movement rights of Derek Ramsamooj, and remedies were ordered including non-pecuniary damages. The Court declared ***“that the application of the beperking mechanism to the Claimant in the circumstances of this case was inconsistent with, and constituted a breach of, his right to freedom of movement under the RTC.”*** (Case Summary Paragraph 13)

The CCJ awarded the Claimant the sum of USD30,000 by way of non-pecuniary damages, as compensation for the clear and significant injury sustained by the Claimant as a result of the serious breach of an important RTC right.

Interestingly, the CCJ further declared ***“that any reliance upon or use in any criminal proceedings against the Claimant of any admission or confession obtained from him during the period of his unlawful detention arising from the Treaty- inconsistent application of the beperking would constitute a breach of Community law.”*** (Case Summary Paragraph 13)

But the enduring and future value of the decision extends far into the future. The logs have been replaced in a few original jurisdiction cases- such as *Myrie* and now *Ramsamooj* - with concrete pillars, and bridges will be built on the Community’s trail.

As Amicus, the CARICOM Secretariat legal team also submitted that ***“that legitimate expectations could arise where precise, unconditional, and consistent assurances had been given and relied upon, and that Community institutions were required to act within the rule of law and not to frustrate such expectations.”*** (Judgement Paragraph 106)

The CCJ did not agree with this position frontally, instead relying on the Charter as an aid to the interpretation of the RTC, since the ***“Charter was adopted by regional consensus, through a resolution of the Conference of Heads of Government that was signed by 13 Member States and an associate Member of the Community.”*** (Judgement Paragraph 124)

The Court also found, squarely that ***“While the Charter is not binding in the strict sense as a treaty or a decision of the Conference, its provisions reflect the shared normative commitments of CARICOM Member States.***

***A reading of the RTC, particularly the rights it confers on Community nationals, in the context of the specific reference to the Charter in the Preamble, buttresses the Court's earlier conclusion that Community law imposes minimum human rights standards that must attend the exercise by Community nationals of their rights under the Treaty . Further, the Charter, as an expression of shared normative commitments of Member States, articulates a minimum human rights baseline that informs the exercise of State power in the Community, especially where Community nationals are exercising Treaty-based rights, such as freedom of movement."* (Judgement Paragraph 125)**

The heart of the decision can be found at Paragraph 133 of the Court's published decision where the CCJ held that ***"The consistent constitutional protection of the right to legal representation throughout the Community supports the conclusion that access to counsel has crystallised into a regional customary standard. That standard informs the interpretation and application of Community law obligations, including those arising under the CARICOM Single Market and Economy ('CSME'), and operates as a constraint on State action where Community nationals are subject to detention, criminal process, or other coercive measures. It follows that, where national authorities act in a manner that impairs or denies access to legal counsel, such conduct must be assessed not only against domestic constitutional norms, but also against the minimum human rights protections required by Community law."***

Bridges of concrete with adequate approaches over which Community Nationals can drive with complete confidence and in safety are being constructed. One day in the not distant future, the legitimate expectation of the citizens of CARICOM will become binding. Member States will one day take the additional step already contemplated and promised, to ensure the binding nature of the Charter. On that day, with those concrete bridges built, and flood mitigation measures in place, the CARICOM trail will be paved, and we will all be able to navigate on a CARICOM Highway, taking us to the future envisioned by our founders in 1972 and 2001.

