



CARIBBEAN COURT OF JUSTICE

**134 HENRY STREET
PORT OF SPAIN
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**
Telephone: (868) 623-2CCJ Fax: (868) 624-4710
Website: www.ccj.org

MEDIA RELEASE
(For immediate release)

**No. 11:2020
08 May 2020**

CCJ TAKES THE LEAD IN ASSISTING JUSTICE SECTOR TO ADAPT TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) yesterday convened a meeting of key personnel in judiciaries, prosecutorial services, state agencies and bar associations throughout the Caribbean in an effort to assess challenges and needs arising from the new paradigm produced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Co-sponsoring the meeting were the JURIST Project, the CCJ Academy for Law and the Caribbean Association of Judicial Officers. The virtual meeting was attended by more than 100 participants across 22 countries and was hailed as a success by attendees. Many of the participants expressed a desire for follow-up regional collaborations.

President of the CCJ, the Honourable Mr. Justice Adrian Saunders, opened the meeting by welcoming the gathering that included seven regional Heads of Judiciary, six Directors of Public Prosecutions and several Court Registrars, Bar Association Presidents and other legal and technical professionals. The conference was co-facilitated by the CCJ President and Mr. Peter Bracegirdle of Global Affairs Canada (GAC), a consultant with the Canadian-funded JURIST project. A significant role in organising the event was also played by APEX, a non-profit agency established by the CCJ in 2017 to provide technology-enabled solutions and training to improve the region's justice delivery sector.

In the first session, the attendees engaged in a discussion of the challenges faced in their jurisdictions by judicial officers, court staff, attorneys and other court users. Issues discussed included health challenges, particularly of court staff but also of court users who are not able to conduct their affairs remotely, either owing to the nature of the services required or the absence or unavailability of desired technology. The gathering noted the challenges in ensuring a) efficient, accessible and effective justice for all court customers; and b) the health and safety of all who work in and use the services provided by the justice sector.

The latter two sessions focused on solutions that have been implemented in various jurisdictions and the lessons learned from these, as well as the needs that have become apparent in addressing the uncertainty that lies ahead. Participants benefited from hearing measures that have been

implemented in other jurisdictions, such as those enabling the conduct of trials in Magistrates' or Parish courts.

The meeting served as a significant first step in combining ideas and efforts across the Caribbean to meet the needs of those working in the justice sector and those seeking to avail themselves of its services. Going forward, the CCJ intends to continue working with its partners and the stakeholders in each of these jurisdictions to ensure that we are all stronger and better positioned to serve our constituents, even when COVID-19 is in our rear view.

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About the Caribbean Court of Justice

The Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) was inaugurated in Port of Spain, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on 16 April 2005 and presently has a Bench of seven judges presided over by CCJ President, the Honourable Mr Justice Adrian Saunders. The CCJ has an Original and an Appellate Jurisdiction and is effectively, therefore, two courts in one. In its Original Jurisdiction, it is an international court with exclusive jurisdiction to interpret and apply the rules set out in the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas (RTC) and to decide disputes arising under it. The RTC established the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). In its Original Jurisdiction, the CCJ is critical to the CSME and all 12 Member States which belong to the CSME (including their citizens, businesses, and governments) can access the Court's Original Jurisdiction to protect their rights under the RTC. In its Appellate Jurisdiction, the CCJ is the final court of appeal for criminal and civil matters for those countries in the Caribbean that alter their national Constitutions to enable the CCJ to perform that role. At present, four states access the Court in its Appellate Jurisdiction, these being Barbados, Belize, Dominica and Guyana. However, by signing and ratifying the Agreement Establishing the Caribbean Court of Justice, Member States of the Community have demonstrated a commitment to making the CCJ their final court of appeal. The Court is the realisation of a vision of our ancestors, an expression of independence and a signal of the region's coming of age.

For more information please contact:

The Public Education & Communications Unit

Tel: (868) 623-2225 exts. 2296, 2246

Email: pecu@ccj.org