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MEDIA RELEASE

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NEEDHAM'S POINT DECLARATION ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. From 18-20 October 2023, Prime Ministers, Attorneys-General, Ministers of National Security, Heads of Judiciaries, judicial officers, Directors of Public Prosecution, Commissioners of Police, Commissioners of Prisons, criminal defence attorneys, law students, and members of civil society from across the region convened at the Hilton Barbados Resort, in Needham's Point, Bridgetown, Barbados for the CCJ Academy for Law's 7th Biennial Conference. Themed "*Criminal Justice Reform in the Caribbean: Achieving a Modern Criminal Justice System*", the Conference aimed to effect improvements in the criminal justice systems in the Caribbean by bringing together stakeholders to develop practical solutions to address the issues plaguing criminal justice. A Declaration embodying experiences, best practices and recommended action adopted by the participants as a commitment to improving criminal justice.

Delivering welcome remarks at the Opening Ceremony on Wednesday 18 October, the Honourable Mr Dale Marshall, Attorney General of Barbados urged attendees to view criminal justice reform from the perspective of small island states and the competing needs for limited resources. Also, speaking at the Opening Ceremony, Chairman of the Academy and CCJ Judge, the Honourable Mr Justice Anderson, recounted the justification for the conference by noting that "an alarming epidemic of crime and criminality has engulfed much of the Caribbean. Many of our citizens simply do not feel safe: in their homes, at work, or in public spaces... At the same time, persons accused of crime are sometimes deprived of their freedom for 5, 10, 15 or more years, (euphemistically referred to as "being on remand"), before they are tried. These and other features of our criminal justice system are not acceptable. They must be reformed. There must be swift justice for the guilty so that there is a correlation between crime and punishment in the public perception. The innocent must not have their liberty and productive years sacrificed on the altar of inefficiency and disinterest. It is time for all victims of criminal justice to have real justice."

CCJ President and Patron of the Academy, the Honourable Mr Justice Adrian Saunders, in declaring the Conference open, underscored the importance of the event. He stated that: "the criminal justice system is an intricate network of actors and systems, comprising multiple stakeholders. We have police, prisons, prosecutors, lawyers, judges, courts, the legislature, probation departments and welfare departments to name a few. Each has their own role, and

jurisdiction, and priorities. But there must be at least, a basic level of coordination among the various players that comprise the system if the system is to be effective”.

The successful three-day programme covered several topical issues surrounding the regional criminal justice system such as sentencing, judge-alone trials, evidence-gathering, the hearsay rule, anti-gang legislation, victims’ rights and plea-bargaining and the effect of crime on development, among others.

The presenters who hailed from the region and further afield included the Honourable Philip J Pierre, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia and Chair of Council for National Security and Law Enforcement; Honourable Chief Justices: Mme Justice Roxane George of Guyana, Mr Justice Bryan Sykes of Jamaica, Mme. Justice Louise Blenman of Belize, Sir Ian Winder of Bahamas, Dame Janice Pereira of the OECS; Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General: the Honourable Delroy Chuck Minister of Justice of Jamaica, the Hon. Anthony Sylvester Attorney General of Belize, Senator the Honourable Reginald Armour of Trinidad and Tobago, the Honourable Garth Wilkin, Attorney General of Saint Kitts and Nevis. The audience also heard contributions from the Honourable Mme Justice Maria Wilson, Justice of Appeal in Trinidad and Tobago; Honourable Mr Justice Geoffery Henderson, High Court Judge in Trinidad and Tobago; Deputy Commissioners of Police: Mr Fitz Bailey of Jamaica and Mr Leamond Deleveaux of The Bahamas. Ms Paula Llewellyn, DPP of Jamaica and Mr Amilcar Sanatan, Assistant Director Gender and Child Affairs in the Office of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, Lord Beckett, Judge of the Supreme Courts of Scotland, Dr Chile Eboe-Osuji, Former President of the International Criminal Court, Sir Robert Francis, Master Treasurer of the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple and Professor David Ormerod, Professor of Law at University College London also formed part of the distinguished group of presenters and panellists for the event.

The declaration, which was discussed, deliberated and adopted by acclamation by the participants, comprised several key areas including policy interventions, legislative interventions, prosecution and police, representation and support for the accused, victims/survivors charter of rights and judicial interventions. Some of the more specific recommendations included the establishment of Public Defender Offices throughout the Caribbean Community, the creation of a new category of judicial officers for handling pre-trial matters; enhanced protection and status for Magistrates to titled “Summary Judges”. There was a collective call for trials to be held within 1 year (but not more than 2-3 years) of the accused being charged; judgments to be delivered within not more than 6 months; enhanced capability and use of forensic science centres in the region to strengthen the prosecution of serious crimes and establishment of a Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund capitalised in part by the proceeds would come from the civil and criminal assets forfeiture.

The Declaration will be published on the CCJ’s website, www.ccj.org and is to be circulated among all relevant stakeholders.

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Attorney General of Saint Kitts and Nevis, Sen. the Hon. Garth-Lucien Wilkin; the Hon. Mr Justice Adrian Saunders, President of the CCJ; Hon. Dale Marshall, SC, MP, Attorney General of Barbados; the Hon. Leslie Mondesir, Attorney General of Saint Lucia and the Hon. Mr Justice Winston Anderson, CCJ Judge and Chairman of the CCJ Academy for Law pose for a photo at the Opening Ceremony of the Conference.



The Hon Mr Justice Ronnie Boodoosingh, Justice of Appeal in Trinidad and Tobago delivers his presentation on Victims' Rights to the packed audience during the second day of the Conference.



Director of Public Prosecutions of Jamaica, Ms Paula Llewelyn, KC makes a contribution during one of the question-and-answer segments on the first day of the Conference.

About the CCJ Academy for Law:

The CCJ Academy for Law is the educational arm of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) dedicated to the advancement and promotion of legal education and research within the Caribbean region. The Academy's primary mandate is to provide informative and innovative perspectives on the rules and the roles of law, particularly International Law. Some of the Academy's key objectives are:

- To provide a forum for discussing legal concepts and rules in the areas particularly of, general international law, international trade law, regional integration law, and comparative law.
- To instigate and encourage debate on the role and content of the discipline of Comparative Law bearing particularly in mind that the major traditions of the common law and civil law systems are represented in the Member States of CARICOM over which the CCJ exercises appellate and original jurisdiction.
- To facilitate training and evaluation and to develop problem-solving capability to enhance all areas of court administration.
- To deliver programmes to enhance practical learning in court administration and a deeper understanding of the role of court administration in judicial independence and accountability and in promoting access to justice.
- To decrease backlogs in case determinations and enhance access to justice in the judiciaries of the region.

Using various modes of delivery, the Academy develops, coordinates, and facilitates seminars, workshops, exchanges, and special lectures, as the primary vehicles for the achievement of its objectives. The Academy is run by its management committee chaired by the Honourable Mr. Justice Winston Anderson, and is responsible for conceptualizing, keeping under review, and giving effect to the objectives of the Academy.

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