



CARIBBEAN COURT OF JUSTICE

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CCJ REINSTATES THE MANSLAUGHTER CONVICTIONS OF TWO POLICE OFFICERS

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. On Friday, 10 April 2026, the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) delivered reasons for its decision in the matter of *The King v Hallet King, Leonard Nunez* [2026] CCJ 6 (AJ) BZ, an appeal from Belize. The Court had earlier heard the matter on Tuesday 20 January 2026, where it allowed the appeal of the Crown and reinstated the manslaughter convictions of two police officers. At the hearing, the Respondents had conceded the main ground of appeal and that left for the Court's determination the trial court's admission of photographs which the Respondents alleged to be prejudicial. The Court in its reasons explained the relevance of the photographs and concluded that the jury was entitled to use them in their consideration of the verdict.

In the proceedings, the Crown appealed the Court of Appeal's reversing of the convictions of the Respondents, Hallet King and Leonard Nunez, two former Belizean policemen who were convicted on a single count of manslaughter for the unlawful death of Hilbert Sotz, while he was in police custody. The two men were initially sentenced to nine months of imprisonment. The Respondents successfully appealed their convictions to the Court of Appeal, on grounds that the trial judge erred in two respects: (i) for failing to instruct the jury that a charge of manslaughter required the prosecution to prove that the accused intended to cause death by unlawful harm; and, (ii) for allowing the prosecution to introduce photographs that were more prejudicial, that is inflammatory, than they were able to prove the charge being prosecuted.

On further appeal, the CCJ Judges mainly addressed the second ground of appeal, as counsel for the Respondents conceded that the Court of Appeal erred in deciding the first. As to that second ground of appeal, the Court found that the photographs formed part of the overall evidence from which the jury was legally free to infer whether the Respondents intended to cause Mr Hotz the harm that led to his death. For that reason, the evidence was not unduly prejudicial. The Court,

therefore, allowed the Crown's appeal and reinstated the convictions of the Respondents. Consequently, the CCJ remitted the matter to the Court of Appeal for a determination of the appropriate sentencing.

The appeal was heard by the Honourable Justices Rajnauth-Lee, Barrow, Jamadar, Ononaiwu, and Eboe-Osuji. Mrs Cheryl-Lynn Vidal, SC, Director of Public Prosecutions, and Ms Maria Nembhard-Santana, Crown Counsel, represented the Appellant, while Mr Arthur Robert Saldivar represented the Respondents.

The full judgment is available on the Court's website at www.ccj.org.

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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 Winston Anderson. 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, five states access the Court in its Appellate Jurisdiction, these being Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Guyana, and Saint Lucia. 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.

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