
PRESS RELEASE

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Court of Appeal Unveils Plans for New Court Term

The Court of Appeal marked the start of the Michaelmas Term with an opening ceremony on September 25, 2017, at which the President of the Court, The Hon. Mr. Justice C. Dennis Morrison, OJ, CD, presided. In his remarks to the gathering, which included members of the public and private Bar and law students, Justice Morrison revealed several initiatives being undertaken by the Court aimed at reducing the inventory of cases while enhancing the administration of justice.

Chief among the initiatives is an increase in the number of judges and support staff, which will be facilitated by the planned expansion of the court into premises which were previously occupied by the Accountant General's Department. "Preliminary building plans have been drawn and I have been told that a contractor has been identified and I am assured that the work will commence sometime this term," Mr. Justice Morrison said.

He announced that "a division of the Court of Appeal will sit in Lucea in the week of December 4 to hear matters from the western part of the island. This will be the second session for this year, following the first session in July". He also indicated that the Court has "decided to establish a Court Users' Committee on which we are asking members of the Bar to serve". This committee is intended to be an interactive and responsive mechanism through which improvements to the Court can be realized.

Of concern for Mr Justice Morrison was the issue of outstanding transcripts as there are 346 outstanding records of proceedings in civil appeals and 342 outstanding transcripts in criminal appeals. The result of this is that these cases are counted as part of the court's backlog, when in reality there is nothing that the court can do to address them until transcripts of the proceedings in the court below are made available. He noted that

while the situation in respect of civil appeals is bad, there are certain mechanisms in the rules of which parties can avail themselves. However, as it relates to the criminal appeals, Mr. Justice Morrison stated that the matter is essentially a "rights issue", given the constitutional promise of a fair trial within a reasonable time. He noted that the Chief Justice and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice are aware of the situation and he has been advised that steps are being taken to address the issue.

Mr Justice Morrison urged members of the Bar to acquaint themselves with the various Practice Directions which are available on the court's website and which have been issued to assist in guiding the court's procedure with a view to increasing its efficiency. He also urged the Bar to ensure that submissions are filed in a timely manner in order to afford the judges adequate preparation time.

In closing, Mr Justice Morrison assured all that the court is "painfully aware that, as a result of limited numbers of judges dealing with an avalanche of cases, parties sometimes feel that they wait far too long for judgments. This is acknowledged with apologies." He indicated that the court is working assiduously to address this issue within the existing constraints.

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