



JURIST Project provides equipment to ensure continuous service in Belize

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to wreak havoc around the world, the Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening (JURIST) Project, as part of its mandate, has been lending business continuity support to regional judiciaries to ensure that their operations remain unaffected during these challenging times.

According to the Belize judiciary, their current network, at its optimum, pre-COVID, was barely managing the workload and an inevitable upgrade was necessary for their systems to be brought into the virtual arena.

On July 12, 2021, the JURIST Project donated Information Technology (IT) equipment to the Belize judiciary to assist in the upgrade of outdated equipment which is used in the delivery of justice.

The Honourable Mme. Justice Michelle Arana, Chief Justice (ag) of Belize, received the equipment at the court's headquarters in Belize City during a short handing over ceremony. Mr. Stephen Babb, Systems Administrator and Ms. Trienia Young, Registrar General, both of the Belize judiciary handed over the equipment to the Honourable Chief Justice as representatives of the Government of Canada and the

JURIST Project could not attend, due to the pandemic.

Justice Arana said that the provision of equipment by the JURIST Project was the culmination of a partnership between the Project and the Supreme Court of Belize designed to improve the efficiency of the administration of our justice system.

The following developments are among the major judicial services that will be enhanced by the donation:

- New wiring for the network will allow for more than 1000 megabytes of data to be shared instead of the current 100 megabytes. This will allow for simultaneous recording in multiple courts, to have virtual courtrooms across the country, and quick digitization of case files.
- The network's backbone has been updated from a copper base to a fiber optic option which will allow for growth and meet the need for more online services.
- The wireless devices such as, access points and laptops are updated and replaced and will be made available for use at the courts, to aid citizens that are lacking the necessary technology to access the services of the courts.
- New desktops to replace the outdated equipment for the General Registry and the Case Management Unit, which will be able to work seamlessly with the scanners, network printers, and new web-based software.
- The enhancement of the case management software and database in the Family and Magistrates Courts was necessary to ensure that the magistrates would have immediate access to the digital case files.
- The current courtroom at the Belize Central Prison will be updated with wireless access points and laptops to connect remotely to the court. This will reduce the need to have prisoners being transported to and from the prison for preliminary court hearings.
- The professional training for staff of IT Unit of

In this Issue

Dear Reader,

Issue 19 of *JURIST News* is here for your reading enjoyment.

In this Issue we focus on the strides being made by the Canadian-funded Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening (JURIST) Project as we manoeuvre the continuing challenges being brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The period June – September 2021 is covered in this issue.

We received approval from the JURIST Project Steering Committee (PSC) in July to continue pursuing activities in our penultimate year, that will continue to enhance and strengthen the capacity of our regional judiciaries and other justice sector stakeholders in the delivery of justice.

In July, the Project officially delivered Information Technology (IT) equipment to the Belize judiciary to support related business continuity and remote working facilitation. The equipment will be utilised to bolster the judiciary's ability to continue uninterrupted during this pandemic and future disasters.

At the start of the Project's Steering Committee Meeting, the Project used the opportunity to

conduct a virtual hand-over of IT and other equipment to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and the Caribbean Association of Judicial Officers (CAJO), to support both organisations' business continuity processes in a more virtual environment.

After many delays, the JURIST Project finally commenced its regional public education and engagement training in September. The training will ultimately support the judiciary and its stakeholders in the development and sustainability of its public education programming.

The Project also received a report from its commissioned study on the existing state of pre-trial detentions in the countries of Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana and Jamaica. The report provides an overview of the pre-trial detention issues in each country, with recommendations for change.

These and other stories are contained in this issue. We hope you enjoy reading the articles. As always, we take this opportunity to remind you that we welcome and appreciate feedback from our readers. We encourage contributions, information or material that we can include in future issues of the Newsletter.

We urge everyone to continue to keep safe.

- *The JURIST Project Team*

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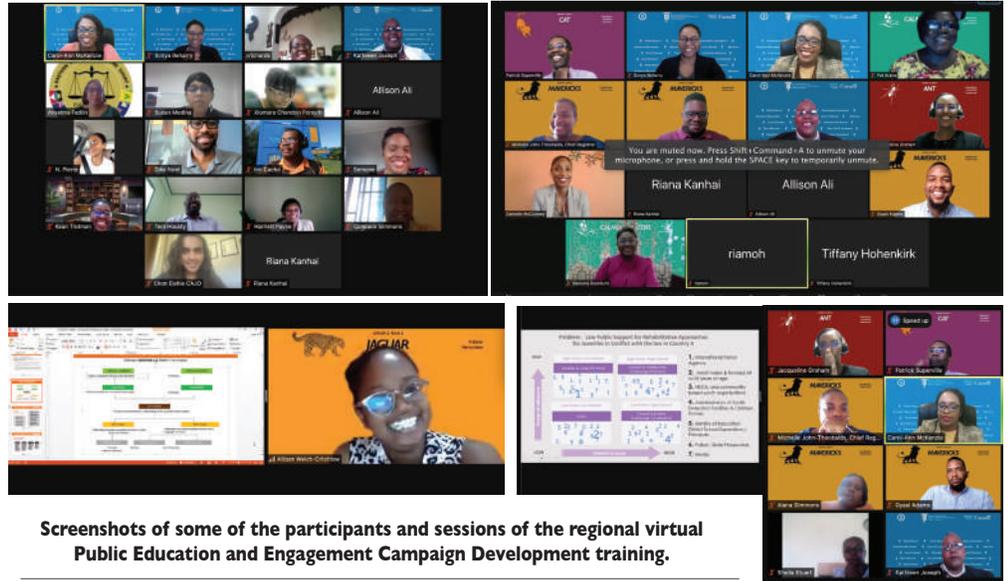
Regional public education training commences

The Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening (JURIST) Project commenced regional virtual Public Education and Engagement Campaign Development training for judiciaries and justice sector stakeholders on September 7, 2021.

The training is a holistic one and the objective is to support regional judiciaries and their stakeholders in the development of interactive, sustainable public education and engagement programming that will contribute to building and strengthening public support for, and confidence in the judiciary.

Speaking at the start of training, Mrs. Gloria Richards-Johnson, Director, JURIST Project, said public education and engagement continues to be a crucial element of the Project. She explained that during a series of collaborative workshops with judiciaries and their stakeholders in the region, there was considerable discussion on the need for more systematic dialogue with their wider target audiences. As such, public education and engagement was ranked as a high priority by each judiciary.

“The issue of lack of confidence in court systems throughout the region seems to strike a chord with the judiciary, the public and politicians alike. The reality for most is that the courts don’t look like responsive, transparent or accountable organisations. This may well be because these characteristics were never seen as vital performance indicators for courts,” she lamented.



Screenshots of some of the participants and sessions of the regional virtual Public Education and Engagement Campaign Development training.

Mrs. Richards-Johnson added that times have changed and the crisis of confidence in the courts is reflective of the emerging views that courts need to catch up with the ever-evolving world. “The issue of confidence in the courts needs to be seen in the larger context of changing perceptions and expectations of government and government institutions. The systematic and responsible engagement of the public provides an important means to provide greater

legitimacy to the courts. The possibility of shutting out the public voice or placating it seems to be the least effective as well as the least creative way of responding to the crisis of confidence in the courts,” she noted.

She stated that the JURIST Project firmly believes that effective engagement offers a much more liberating and satisfying prospect. However, she

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the judiciary with a CompTIA Network+ certification course which will strengthen the Unit’s ability to configure the new equipment and monitor for emerging threats to the infrastructure.

“This donation by the JURIST Project is timely as the current network at the Supreme Court of Belize is over 10 years old and in urgent need of repair. With the increased need for technology amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, this equipment will greatly assist us as we move most of the services of our courts and Registry online,” Justice Arana explained.

She added that the judiciary was looking forward to embracing the opportunities now afforded to them through the new equipment and training, which will greatly assist them in providing the best quality of judicial services to national and international court users.

Mrs. Gloria Richards-Johnson, Director, JURIST Project, said the equipment will redound to the benefit of the courts and everyone they serve. She added: “The provision of this equipment to the judiciary will also assist the Project in achieving one of its overarching objectives which is to reduced delay and backlog.”

She noted the Project was pleased to support Belize and other judiciaries in the region to strengthen their capacities in improving court efficiency and



(Centre) The Honourable Mme. Justice Michelle Arana, Chief Justice (Ag) of Belize, receives a laptop donated by the Canadian-funded JURIST Project from Mr. Stephen Babb, Systems Administrator (left) while Ms. Trienia Young, Registrar General, (both of the Belize judiciary) looks on

effectiveness during this unprecedented time. “The JURIST Project is responding swiftly and fully to the pandemic and uncertainties in the environment. We recognize the need to adapt our approach to respond to the impact of COVID-19, which will be felt beyond Project completion,” she emphasized.

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advised that true engagement of the public needs to start from a position of respecting and valuing public input and providing conditions where public judgement can be accurately captured or reflected.

She reiterated that the JURIST Project prides itself in listening to the needs of its many stakeholders. “We have heard the call of the judiciaries and our many stakeholders who recognise that there is an urgent need for us to start engaging in a more meaningful way with our varied target audiences in each territory. This is one of the reasons for the training,” remarked the Project Director.

This training along with others undertaken by the JURIST Project builds the capacities of court staff and other justice sector stakeholders which supports judiciaries, to undertake public education and engagement initiatives and other programs that will redound to the benefit of all judicial and justice sector stakeholders.

To do this, the Project continuously promotes an approach that includes a varied stakeholder group. The Project’s goal for this training is to ensure and encourage judiciaries to maintain sustained dialogue with their many target audiences including men, women, youth and the poor on issues such as the different levels of courts, their roles and responsibilities, and the role of the judicial sector in ensuring gender equality in access to justice.

The training is in-dept and highly interactive and covers the fundamentals of public education and engagement campaign development and implementation. There are two cohorts which comprise of a wide cross section of court staff and justice sector stakeholders from across the region. The training is being conducted over seven consecutive weekly sessions (one day per week) from 9 am to 1 pm.

Study on pre-trial detention finalised

Pre-trial detention, in its current format, is being over-used.

This is one of the findings of a study into the state of pre-trial detentions in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana and Jamaica, commissioned by the Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening (JURIST) Project.

The study sought to identify inter alia:

- The type of charges that have been laid against inmates who are presently in pre-trial detention;
- The date when pre-trial detention commenced:
 - (i) Whether bail was granted?
 - (ii) Whether prisoner(s) could meet bail conditions and if not, why?
- The ratio of inmates that have obtained bail as opposed to those to whom bail was denied;
- The options available to ensure that persons turn up for their court hearings;
- The relevant prison conditions to which inmates are subject during the period of their pre-trial detention, such as physical conditions and length of time, and whether the inmate is separated from convicted criminals; and
- How often detainees were visited by a judge, Justice of the Peace or relevant country official.

The report indicated that the countries included in the study have experienced an increase in a range of criminal activities, more pointedly, violent crimes

over the past few years. This has resulted in policy makers and the public wanting their respective Governments to adopt a more robust approach to tackling crime which normally equates to the request that more persons should be placed on pre-trial detention rather than on bail.

It was stated in the report, that in many countries, it has been argued that pre-trial detention continues to be imposed systematically on those suspected of a criminal offence without considering whether it is necessary or proportionate, or whether if less intrusive measures could be applied.

Further, this proportion of people being held in pre-trial detention facilities is extremely high and the periods of their detention are often prolonged well beyond any legal limits. This was evidenced in the countries in the study where on average, the pre-trial detainees are in custody for at least two to three years.

These numbers, the report noted, represent a very large number of people in prison who have not been convicted of a criminal offence but are waiting for their guilt or innocence to be established by a court. Some will eventually be acquitted of any crime, but all should be presumed innocent.

The report goes on to detail the pre-trial environments in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana and Jamaica, as well as propose measures that could likely reduce their pre-trial detainee numbers.

If you would like a copy of the report, please send your request to the JURIST Project at: jurist@juristproject.org.

JURIST Project meets new SOMC judges

The Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening (JURIST) Project is committed to the successful implementation of the *Model Guidelines for Sexual Offence Cases in the Caribbean Region* (Guidelines) and seamless operations of the Sexual Offences Model Court (SOMC).

With the departure of the Honourable Mr. Justice Iain Morely, who served as a High Court judge in Antigua and Barbuda and was subsequently reassigned to St. Kitts and Nevis, two new judges were assigned to SOMC, namely the Honourable Mr. Justice Colin Williams and the Honourable Mme. Justice Ann-Marie Smith. Both judges will

serve the SOMC, have a wealth of judicial experience and are committed to the overarching goals of the court.

In August, the Project hosted a meeting with the new judges together with the Honourable Mr. Justice Adrian Saunders, President, Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and the Honourable Mme. Justice Maureen Rajnauth-Lee, Judge, CCJ. The meeting served as an opportunity for the Project to share information related to the development of the Guidelines and the establishment of the SOMC as well as share lessons and achievements of the court.

The Project also used the occasion to outline its plans moving forward to support the court and provided stakeholders with a platform to reaffirm their commitment to the success of the SOMC and promotion of gender-sensitive adjudication. The Project is currently in the process of developing a few key activities which will foster an exchange of knowledge and capacity building which will support sustainability of the SOMC.

The JURIST Project wishes to extend its gratitude to Justice Morely for his unwavering service to the SOMC and wishes him the best in his future endeavours.

Supporting business continuity in CCJ AND CAJO

The Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening (JURIST) Project has provided much needed Information Technology (IT) equipment to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and the Caribbean Association of Judicial Officers (CAJO), to support their regional business continuity efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The virtual handover took place at the start of the Project's Steering Committee (PSC) meeting, which was held on July 22, 2021, via the Microsoft Teams platform.

Speaking at the handover, the Honourable Mr. Justice Peter Jamadar, Judge, CCJ and Chairman, CAJO, explained that CAJO's virtual classroom was designed in response to the shifting landscape of adult education delivery, and prompted by COVID-19 restrictions. He said the classroom combines several pieces of technological equipment, to deliver training that transcends the usual virtual learning environment.

This virtual classroom is critical to the CAJO's innovative and sustainable delivery of judicial education and training across the region. It allows participants to attend and interact with facilitators in a user-friendly setting. It provides a space for facilitators to be interactive and impactful, moving beyond the familiar 'sitting-in-front-of-the-computer' method of delivery. Educators can facilitate sessions as if in an in-person classroom – yet virtually. Teaching, learning, and engaged participation are enhanced in virtual settings.

"Thus, the virtual classroom better positions the CAJO to move judicial education boldly forward in sustainable ways. This capacity allows for the CAJO to expand its reach and offer greater opportunities for regional training and education," he stated.

The CAJO received all equipment in late March 2021. In May and June 2021, the CAJO deployed its first fully outfitted virtual classroom, funded by the JURIST Project. The virtual classroom was successfully utilised for the CCJ's 2021 Judicial Training Series.

Ms. Michele Gibson, Senior Development Officer, High Commission of Canada to Barbados, said the handover was a perfect example of a very sound partnership among the CCJ, regional judiciaries, countries and the Government of Canada. She noted that she was pleased to hear that the virtual classroom was operational and proved critical and functional in its roll out. "We have been able to respond to the many needs of the region during these trying times and I really want to applaud the President and Registrar and CCJ for their leadership on discussions, research and development, to look at the issues and challenges we must face during this time," she added.

The Honourable Mr. Justice Adrian Saunders, President, CCJ, indicated that while the CCJ has always had to rely heavily on a robust technological infrastructure so as to effectively meet the needs of a geographically dispersed customer base, the onset of the pandemic compelled adjustments to their work methods as judges and staff alike were constrained to work from home.

He continued: "This necessarily required upgraded technology to facilitate the deployment of an entirely virtual courtroom, to cater for full remote work capabilities for the staff, and to enhance the mechanisms and procedures regarding the security of the court's data."



(Top l-r) Ms. Michele Gibson, Senior Development Officer, High Commission of Canada to Barbados; Mrs. Gloria Richards-Johnson, Director, JURIST Project together with (bottom l-r) the Hon. Mr. Justice Adrian Saunders, President, CCJ and the Hon. Mr. Justice Peter Jamadar, Judge, CCJ and Chairman, CAJO at the virtual handover ceremony

Justice Saunders added that the support, provided by the JURIST Project, bolstered the court's ability to continue to deliver its core and related services reliably and safely during the pandemic. More importantly, it has contributed to the achievement of a strategic goal that the court set for itself, namely enhancing regional justice system capacity and performance.

Both Justice Saunders and Justice Jamadar expressed their sincerest gratitude to the JURIST Project and the Government of Canada who they said have consistently supported their work and that of the judiciaries across the region.

Mrs. Gloria Richards-Johnson, Director, JURIST Project said the Project was all about partnerships and collaboration. "We recognise that without the support of you – our valuable stakeholders within the local jurisdictions where we work, none of our objectives will be achieved. We depend on you to ensure that all initiatives we undertake are sustained long after the Project ends," she noted.

Guyana to receive COVID-19 assistance from JURIST Project

The Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening (JURIST) Project has rendered assistance to the Guyana judiciary's efforts to ensure business continuity in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In September, the Project provided the judiciary with much needed technology and tools to enable virtual hearings and a remote work environment across the country's three counties. This intervention is critical given the continuous increase in the spread of COVID-19.