



THE ECSC -

**THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS
AN ACCESSIBLE COURT**

Address by:
Her Ladyship, The Hon. Dame Janice M Pereira, DBE, Chief Justice
To mark the Opening of the Law Year 2016-2017
Date: Tuesday 20th September 2016
Location: Castries, St. Lucia



- Justices of Appeal, Judges and Masters of the ECSC;
- Their Excellencies, Heads of State of each of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Honourable Heads of Government of each of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Retired Judges of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court;
- Honourable Kim St. Rose, Attorney General of Saint Lucia, and Hon. Attorneys General of each of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Honourable Ministers of Government of Saint Lucia and of each of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Chief/Senior Magistrates and Magistrates of the OECS;
- Honourable Speakers of the Houses of Assembly and Presidents of the Senate of each of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Honourable Leaders of the Opposition of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Members of Parliament of each of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Dr. Didicus Jules, Director General, OECS Commission;
- Directors of Public Prosecutions of each of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Mrs. Brender Portland-Reynolds, Solicitor General of Saint Lucia and Solicitors General of each of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Mrs. Kimberly Cenac-Phulgence, Chief Registrar, Mrs. Michelle John-Theobalds, Deputy Chief Registrar, Registrars, as well as Deputy and Assistant Registrars of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court;

- Mr. Gregory Girard, Court Administrator, and Mr. Francis Letang, Deputy Court Administrator of the Court's Headquarters;
- Mr. Thaddeus Antoine, President of the OECS Bar Association, Mrs. Mary Juliana Charles, President of the Bar Association of Saint Lucia and Presidents of the constituent Bar Associations of the Eastern Caribbean;
- Learned members of the Inner Bar of each of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Members of the Utter Bar of each of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Members of the Clergy;
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps.;
- Mr. Severin Moncherry, Commissioner of Police in Saint Lucia and other Commissioners of Police of the other Member States and Territories, Police Officers;
- Mr. Verne Garde, Director of the Bordelais Correctional Facility of Saint Lucia, and other Directors / Heads of Correctional Facilities of each of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Staff of the Court's Headquarters and the various Court Offices in each of the OECS Member States and Territories;
- Distinguished Guests;
- Students;
- Citizens and residents of the Eastern Caribbean:

Good Morning

I am deeply honoured and humbled to greet you once again and for the opportunity to address you as I have done over the past few years. As customary, this address is being streamed live via simulcast, this year, from the beautiful Helen of the West Indies and the Host Country of the Court's Headquarters - Saint Lucia. Every year we look forward to the ceremonial opening of the law year which commences with a church service and culminates with a special sitting of the court. This is for us, as well as for you, a time of reflection on the workings of the court over the previous year, and a time to share with you our plans for moving forward along the single and focused pathway of delivery of justice while consistently refining and redefining the stepping stones along the way, with the objective of improving and hopefully attaining equal access to justice.

It behoves me at the onset to make mention of the fact that this year's opening is truly extra special, as it marks the commencement of the Court's 50th anniversary celebratory year! The Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court will achieve its golden anniversary on February 27th, 2017. This is quite an achievement measured on any scale. As the year progresses we will share with you our plans and the ways in which you can participate in marking this auspicious event. We invite each and every one of you to be a part of our celebration because this is our court, and our achievement. Therefore, we all have reason to celebrate!

I think it is fair to say that our Court has grown from strength to strength, remaining steadfast to our mandate in striving to provide "*access to a system*

of justice that is fair, efficient, accountable and independent." This is the yardstick by which we must be held accountable by the citizens of the region whom we serve.

The concept or notion of equal access to justice or access to the court is so well known that it may well be considered as being unnecessary to restate. More fundamental however, is the question of how this notion or concept is understood. Is it merely an expression bleated out with a hollow ring, or one written and dismissed into oblivion or, is it a concept that defines the very core of the rights and freedoms that ought to be enjoyed by all in our free and democratic societies? We are all aware that in constitutional democracies such as ours within our OECS grouping, and where our constitutions are the supreme law of the land, that they provide for access to the court for the purpose of protecting not only those rights and freedoms expressly recognized therein from actual or threatened infringement, but also a mechanism for the promulgation of laws, by which private rights and obligations are to be governed and observed. The concept then of access to justice and access to the court is fundamentally rooted in the observance and protection of the rule of law which is the foundation of any democratic society. It is therefore worth taking a moment to ponder whether the rule of law would have any meaning if there is no access to justice. Equal justice and equal access to justice must not be allowed to become the purview of the rich or the powerful, for then, it would not be considered justice, far less equal access to justice. The stride to achieve equal justice may be viewed as one of the highest ideals

consistently pursued by any legal system grounded in the acknowledgement, respect and observance of our basic human rights.

One of the vital principles of the rule of law is that laws should be accessible, clear, precise and open to public scrutiny; and courts must be accessible, affordable and disputes resolved without excessive delay. When one thinks of access to justice what often comes to mind is the ease by which an individual, group or entity is able to gain access to the courts to seek redress for grievances, consistent with human rights charters, and domestic and international law. However, access to justice runs deeper than just the improvement of an individual or entity's accessibility to the court or their ability to gain legal representation.

There can be no adequate access to justice if persons are: unable to utilize the justice system because it is physically or financially inaccessible; where citizens are unaware of their legal rights; where the means of access are so mired in complexity or disproportionate fetters; or where the legal system is weak. There cannot be equal justice where discriminatory laws, rules or practices insulate and permit gender biases to persist or which allow the oppression of the weak, the poor and vulnerable. Similarly, we must ask ourselves how child-friendly are our laws and procedures and, by extension, our courts. Access to justice and equal justice therefore occupies a broad spectrum along an ever evolving continuum shaped by our social norms and values, which themselves are in a constant state of evolution.

Access to justice therefore includes legal protection, legal awareness, legal aid and enforcement and all the initiatives which are geared towards

ensuring that all persons can have their voices heard, exercise their rights, challenge discrimination or hold decision-makers accountable. It supports peace in a society by giving an individual an alternative to vigilante justice and violence in resolving disputes. Access to justice therefore sustains the rule of law. So I ask the question, *“What use is the rule of law if there is no access to justice?”* If we advance the rule of law and aim to uphold it, irrespective of our positions of power or privilege, and meaningfully set about enjoying our rights and freedoms with due responsibility and regard for the rights and freedoms of others, it would then be true to say that real progress has been made in achieving the objective of providing and sustaining a legal system which is able to promote equal justice and protect equal access to justice. We only have to look at many parts of the world, as reported in the daily news, to appreciate that in societies where the judiciary comes under threat, or where its independence is undermined, the rule of law is placed in peril. So too, the rights and freedoms that we across our region enjoy and often take for granted, are also placed in peril.

There can be no doubt that the explosion of internet and communication technology in this modern era where information is virtually instantaneous with a tap or a click, that the court and the methods by which it handles dispute resolution, ranging from physical and financial accessibility, to procedural proficiency and timeliness, has brought with it positive developments but also increased scrutiny. The court therefore, must be positioned and poised to leverage in a meaningful way the benefits which may be derived from the use of modern technology.

It is also true to say that never has the judiciary come under greater threat to its independence than in this era, perhaps referable in part, to the same instantaneous access to information and the exercise of the freedom of expression. The notoriety and pervasiveness of social media is inescapable. In this context I hasten to add however, that it must always be borne in mind that our freedoms are not absolute. Indeed, access to the court is not an absolute right. With the enjoyment of freedoms comes the concomitant duty of responsibility. This is reflected in the biblical expression "*to whom much is given much is required*". But let us not pretend or elide the reality with preferred politically correct mutism. Attempts, let me repeat "attempts" at judicial interference are on the rise. These attempts emanate from places and persons, and by methods which you would least expect. The judiciary as an institution, and through its judicial officers, must remain resolute and focused in their mandate to ensure equal access to justice and equal justice. They must fiercely, unhesitatingly and without fear or favour, guard and defend their role as protectors and enforcers of the rule of law- the guardians of our constitutions. That must remain our mission, a mission which in every respect is one of the highest callings in a free society.

It is for this reason that my address today is entitled "*The ECSC - The movement towards an accessible court*". I propose today to outline those steps taken to date by the court and the achievements made so far in pursuit of this mission.

Firstly, it was recognized that a critical look was needed at its processes – what and who were the drivers of the court’s processes and what were the consequences within the society and the resultant impact on a country’s economic development. It was a notorious fact that a state of malaise was the culture. A writ commencing proceedings or more egregiously a without-notice injunction could lie for years without further action or resolution. The implementation in the year 2000 of a reforming procedural regime by the adoption of the Civil Procedure Rules 2000 sought to place the court in the driver's seat by giving to the court a plenitude of case management powers buttressed by stiff sanctions aimed at significantly reducing, if not eliminating altogether, the lackadaisical environment which had gripped the justice system and which made access to the court and to justice an elusive concept. Today, the court, in its civil jurisdiction, can be proud of the fact that disputes taking ten or up to fifteen years to disposition is largely a thing of the past with matters now going through the court system at a much faster pace. Indeed it is not unusual for matters to reach the appellate level of the court, on average, within two years. On this score there is still considerable work to be done. Amendments were also made to the Rules so as to bring about greater efficiency, the most substantial of which were in 2011. The processes are continuously monitored for tracking areas in need of improvement not only for enhancing timeliness, but also for the purpose of streamlining and simplifying procedures which are all integral to improving access to the court and to justice.

Secondly, the court had to examine its structures and evaluate whether dividing its jurisdiction into more specialized divisions would better serve the needs of the public, given the rapid expansion of trade and commerce, information, developing social trends, and the impact of international events which have brought about new challenges. This has led to the thrust to carve out from the court's general jurisdiction four main divisions namely, civil, commercial, criminal and family, to be specially manned by capable and dedicated judicial officers, complete with a cadre of competent and dedicated support staff, and systems uniquely designed to meet the needs, sensitivity and efficaciousness demanded from our court in fulfilling its mission within this rapidly changing landscape.

The creation of a commercial division in the Virgin Islands in 2008, with the full support of the Government, saw a boom in the number and complexity of commercial disputes in which international business entities deliberately chose the commercial court of the Virgin Islands as the forum for their resolution. This level of confidence was not earned overnight, but by the toil and sterling efforts of its first commercial judge, who steered its processes to the heights of excellence recognized around the world, and who has certainly set the bar for continued and consistently high standards. I assure you that the court is doing all within its power to ensure that high standards, qualitatively and quantitatively are maintained.

The State of Saint Lucia followed through with supporting the creation of a commercial division operationalized in January of this year. That division

is also manned by its own judicial officer and from reports received has been functioning well. Reforming legislative changes aimed at facilitating commercial processes is also being addressed. These steps in turn provide relevant indicia for assessing the ease of doing business in the State of Saint Lucia. As with the implementation of any new structure, time must be allowed for assessing its impact and an appreciation of the ways in which access to justice has been improved by this measure and the degree by which it will have eased the pressure off the traditional civil courts in better managing the volume of civil disputes which are constantly increasing, but which nonetheless, can benefit from a greater and more sustained level of efficiency. Here too, there is still much work to be done if the benefits of improved access to the court are to truly lead to improved and equal access to justice.

Thirdly, it was thought fit to implement criminal divisions also presided over by judicial officers ideally suited with the relevant experience and sensitivity to tackle a host of challenges thrown up in the criminal justice system. As you are aware from previous addresses, a pilot project was implemented in Saint Lucia augmented by the Criminal Procedure Rules which have been recently amended to ensure smoother operation of the processes engaged from the time of preferring a criminal complaint to disposition. All year criminal sittings, running in tandem with the civil sittings, now occur in all but the smaller States and Territories of the OECS with appreciable positive results on the backlog of criminal cases which have plagued the criminal justice system. The State of Saint Lucia which

warrants special mention has seen increased criminal activity which poses a challenge not only for the court, but the resources of the State. Current data shows over 1000 criminal cases still pending. This is far too high and is the highest in the OECS. However, this state of affair, with the support of the Government, is being tackled frontally. Commencing very shortly, the Criminal Division in Saint Lucia will be manned by a total of four judges, including a criminal division Master instituted in 2014. So far, the measures introduced, coupled with others such as the Early Guilty Plea Scheme and Sentence Indications, have aided in a considerable reduction of the criminal backlog as well as swifter disposition of long outstanding matters. We were able to realize the disposition of more than **300** criminal cases in one law quarter. These measures are going to be robustly applied along with others already put in train, with a view towards eliminating this backlog and also by adapting a series of measures aimed at sustaining improved quality of access to justice not only in respect of an accused but also in respect of victims of crimes and thus society in general. Some of these require a few legislative changes and it is my hope that the other branches of the State will take the necessary action in the near future. These complementary measures will promote greater confidence in the ability of the justice system to ensure meaningful access to justice and thus the protection and preservation of this constitutional right which is so fundamental to the achievement of safety, peace and good order in our societies. That said, we are aware that there are still, many miles to go. I assure you, that the court and its cadre of officers are committed to going the distance notwithstanding the reality of inadequate resources.

A further carve out of the court's jurisdiction is being undertaken in relation to family matters. A considerable amount of work has already been done with a view to the implementation of a pilot program in the State of Antigua and Barbuda. The Commonwealth of Dominica has expressed an interest in following suit. Indeed, it was the hope that the pilot program in Antigua and Barbuda would have come to fruition at the commencement of this Law Year, but it must be appreciated that these changes take a great deal of time, money and other resources all of which must be synchronized in order to get off the ground. We are nearing completion of the remaining groundwork. We are very grateful for the donor assistance provided by UNICEF toward these Family Law initiatives. I look with hope to the future, when our men, women and children would be able to realize the resolution of family issues in an environment uniquely designed to administer family justice in a way that will impact positively on the social fabric of our societies.

In pursuing these initiatives, it was also realized that cross-cutting measures should also be pursued in full appreciation of the fact that access to justice does not only entail resolution of disputes through the courts. Fostering alternative dispute resolution mechanisms (commonly known by its acronym "ADR") plays a critical role. The process of mediation (court-connected and otherwise) is a powerful tool. It is actively encouraged by the court and is provided for in our Civil Procedure Rules. It will be a foundation plank in the Family Proceedings Rules. The concept is similarly not alien to the criminal justice system. Consideration is being given to

introducing mediation in relation to a category of less serious criminal offences, as well as to making mediation mandatory under the civil justice system. Such measures, if embraced by the public, can only result in a 'win-win' outcome for all concerned, not to mention the reduction of the pressures currently at play in an already overburdened court system. Mediation has proven successful in many of our States. The Court is committed to training more mediators generally as well as in specialty areas for greater effectiveness and efficiency. In the jurisdiction we now have approximately 475 persons who have been trained and certified under our Mediation Training Program operated under the aegis of the Judicial Education Institute. Consideration is also being given to actively promoting other ADR mechanisms such as arbitration, judicial settlement conferences and the conceptualization of a tool termed "Early Neutral Evaluation" which would seek to avoid a dispute before it gets to the court's door. These are all measures which, when viewed holistically, have a positive impact on access to the court and access to justice. The reality is that we must come around to the view and embrace the fact that ADR is not an anathema to the court but rather, seen as the first choice, and litigation through the court, the last.

Another cross-cutting measure is the continued focus on judicial education and the potential it holds for building capacity, sensitivity, developing specialized skill sets, as well as familiarization with and use of modern cutting edge technology. The need for continuing judicial education cannot be overly emphasized. Unlike the civil law jurisdictions where

formal training institutions have been established for those who seek a career on the bench, our common law systems recruit from among experienced practicing members of the profession with further training, on appointment, to the bench. Whatever may be said of either approach, both regard continuing judicial education as a prerequisite in improving the quality of the delivery of justice to the public.

Over the years the Judicial Education Institute has, with the assistance of many donor agencies and Member Governments, embarked on several training programs ranging from judgment writing, sensitization in respect of gender-related and family issues, the treatment of vulnerable witnesses to the conduct of civil and criminal trials with focus on specific areas of challenge. Training has also been conducted on the use of various aspects of e-technology all aimed at bringing a greater level of efficacy and efficiency into the system. At this juncture, I place on record my sincere thanks and appreciation for the diligent work and dedication during her years of tenure, of the former Chair of JEI, Justice of Appeal, Blenman. May I also take this opportunity to welcome our new Chair, Justice Kathy-Ann Latchoo who, earlier this year, assumed the helm with much vigor and enthusiasm.

It goes without saying that access to justice has not been achieved if there is undue delay in the resolution of disputes. Here also, it is recognized that there is still much work to be done. There is no question that the schedule of a judicial officer is a demanding one which at times can be overwhelming. This can lead to fatigue and burn out in a system where

demands, as well as expectations, are continually increasing in an era of lightning speed communication. It is imperative therefore that judicial officers remain mindful of the numerous challenges and develop best practices aimed at better and more productive management of listing and hearing schedules as well as for timely delivery of judgments. Often time the only aspect of the judicial process on which attention is focused is “the judgment”, without much thought for the sheer volume of matters also requiring the same judge’s time and attention. At the appellate level the challenge is magnified given the itinerant nature of the Court across nine Member States. Comparatively, our number of judicial officers is small compared to the significant output which can be viewed on the Court’s website and in our Annual Report. This is no mean achievement. This is a testament to the hard diligent work, and unswerving commitment of our judicial officers despite many constraints. We are reminded by the spirited sermonette of Pastor Renee at that uplifting church service this morning of the joy of service. We thank him and his team of Ministers for ministering to us.

Italian jurist Mauro Cappelletti, posited;

“Effective access to justice can ... be seen as the most basic requirement – the most basic ‘human right’ – of a system which purports to guarantee legal rights”.

This would therefore mean that as long as we recognize the importance of human rights then there must be in place systems to guarantee a platform

on which these rights can find redress should they be trampled upon. If there is no recourse, through justice, by which a person who has been aggrieved can find redress, then one would ask what is the use of being afforded human rights. This therefore puts into context the importance of access to justice for all persons and the need to ensure that these are adequate. Every State has an obligation to its citizens to ensure effective access to justice – it is a basic human right, a constitutional right which cannot be ignored.

This brings me to the responsibilities of the State.

The Court cannot achieve true accessibility and equal access to justice in a vacuum. It must be adequately funded.

It is the States' and Territories' responsibility to provide adequate financial resources to the judiciary, and I dare say: this ought not to be chased after by the Judiciary, but rather forthcoming with promptitude. It is also their responsibility to provide to the judiciary, adequate physical facilities and related infrastructure, among other things. The court rooms and other facilities in many of our Member States and Territories are in a deplorable condition and have been for several years. There are some deficiencies that are so basic as to be shocking. The Halls of Justice Project formulated by the court for the construction of adequate court facilities has been put forward, discussed and discussed and, regrettably, is still being discussed for more than a decade. If our citizenry is to truly enjoy access to justice in a way that is effective and meaningful these deficiencies must be addressed – not another decade from now but as a matter of urgency. Much of the e-

technology which the court wishes to utilize for bringing greater efficiency into the system and for streamlining and simplifying various court processes that are more beneficial to the public are simply incompatible with archaic, dilapidated and dysfunctional physical spaces and buildings which lead to frustration on the part of court users, and leaves much to be desired in instilling a sense of purpose, importance and confidence by the public in the courts. Lack of proper physical facilities continues to hamper the court's progress in fulfilling its mission and thus negatively impacts access to justice. I take this opportunity to once again call upon all States to urgently address these matters. The settled view held by many that the judiciary is the third cousin of the State is one which must be eschewed and should be forever banished. We have only to look at other parts of the world where deliberate investment has been made in the judiciary to understand the positive effect and the redounding economic benefit flowing to those societies as a whole. True and equal access to justice is a sine qua non for peace, security, and law and order in any society.

Why then, I ask, that nearly 50 years on, very little has been done in addressing the needs of the judiciary in our region? For far too long the judiciary has been made to "make do" with precious little while at the same time the citizenry hold great expectations.

It is also the State's responsibility to provide adequate resources to those who are tasked with the detection, investigation and prosecution of crimes. This is crucial to the due administration of the criminal justice system. Physical structures, irrespective of how becoming, may as well be non-

existent unless the necessary human resources are deployed to 'utilize and fill' them. Too often one hears the refrain of a lack of confidence in the justice system from victims of crime and from persons accused of crime alike. This means that access to justice is not being truly achieved. This is a serious shortcoming which must be addressed by all stakeholders in restoring and maintaining public confidence in the judiciary. If it is that I sound like a broken record then so be it. I will continue the drumbeat for improvements until the sound of the falling tree in the forest is heard.

Members of the legal profession must also bear some responsibility for advancing access to the courts and access to justice. They must remain astute and vigilant in their critique of existing and proposed laws and a voice in ensuring that they are proportionate, that they bear a rational connection to the aims to be achieved, and that they generally meet the needs of society. Members of the legal profession have a crucial role to play in ensuring effective access to justice by actively pursuing their clients' causes in a timely and efficient manner, by making the best use of resources and by actively assisting the court in dealing with cases justly. Effective access to justice is not advanced or achieved by engaging in dilatory and deceptive practices. It is their professional responsibility to uphold the dignity, respect and authority of the court at all times. This responsibility lies at the heart of delivery of justice.

When persons can attest to the fact that the justice system is operating efficiently and effectively, it exudes a confidence in the system showing

that it is in fact geared towards the fair resolution of disputes. This is further strengthened by the link between access to justice and the rule of law, which lies at the foundation of a healthy democracy. In the coming year, the court will continue to strive to ensure that our efforts remain focused on enhancing access to justice so that our responsibility to litigants is realized.

A very vital component of access to justice which is too often overlooked are the human resources charged with the responsibility of ensuring that access is not only achieved but also administered. For this I would like to thank my brother and sister members of the judiciary who have made it their duty to administer justice with professionalism and excellence. As I expressed earlier, you continue to work tirelessly, mainly under sub-par conditions, with minimal complaint. For this I thank you. The people of the OECS and the wider region have benefited from your hard work and undoubtedly will continue to do so. I pray that God gives us fortitude and good health to continue in this service.

I take the opportunity here to welcome to the bench and into the ECSC family, our most recent appointees with every good wish that they will find their sojourn on the bench mentally stimulating, enlightening and rewarding.

Over the past year we lost one of our very own, His Lordship, The Honorable Justice Frederick Bruce-Lyle. Justice Bruce-Lyle was appointed as a High Court Judge in 2000 after a short acting stint. During his tenure on the bench he was assigned to Saint Lucia, Antigua & Barbuda, St. Kitts

& Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It was in the latter that he spent the greater part of his judicial life and remained until his retirement in March 2015. Justice Bruce-Lyle acted as a Justice of Appeal on several occasions and also served as a member of the Judicial and Legal Services Commission for six (6) years from 2008 to 2014. He was a jurist who served our region with integrity and we will always be grateful for the dedicated service that he gave to the court. We will forever remember his meticulous nature, his sound legal mind and wit. We place on record our heartfelt condolences to his family.

I would also at this point wish to recognize the Registrars, Deputy Registrars, Members of the IT Departments and other members of staff of the various Court offices throughout the OECS and the Court's Headquarters. This is an opportune time to thank you, not only for the efforts made at ensuring the success of today's Opening Ceremony, but also for your continued hard work and dedication to the cause of justice. Whatever your part, you play a significant role in the efficient working of the judicial system. Make no mistake, without you the wheels of justice would not turn and for this we remain grateful. Remember always that the effort we singlehandedly place into ensuring the greatness of our court plays an integral part in the Court collectively attaining its success. I want to encourage you to keep striving for greatness every day no matter the circumstances.

I wish to extend gratitude to the OECS Heads of Government, for the support given to the court over the past law year. We look forward to your continued support in the new law year and beyond.

I also extend my gratitude to the Director General and staff of the OECS Commission for the support and assistance which they provided to the court throughout the last year. It would also be remiss of me not to make mention of the untimely passing of Mr. Raymond O'Keiffe who held the post of Communications Officer at the Commission for over a decade. On occasions such as this, Mr. O'Keiffe's exuberance would be ever present as he would be responsible for the broadcast via the radio stations in the different Member States and Territories via the OECS Newslink. We offer our condolences to Mr. O'Keiffe's widow, children, other family members and the Commission.

Sincere appreciation is also extended to the Commissioners of Police, Police Officers, Superintendents/Directors of Prisons/Correctional Facilities and prison officers of our Member States and Territories for your valiant efforts displayed on a daily basis to ensure the due administration of justice.

To the Honorable Attorneys General and Ministers of Legal Affairs or Justice, Directors of Public Prosecutions, Presidents of the Bar Associations, Attorneys-at-law, and all government departments and agencies, I remain ever grateful for the support given to the judiciary and the cause of justice at large.

Finally to you the citizens of the OECS I thank you for your confidence in the court, even in trying times. There is still much more that we hope to do to make our court fully accessible to you. As we work towards getting there we ask for your continued support. As we prepare to celebrate the court's 50th anniversary, the court has planned a number of celebratory activities, many of which are geared towards enhancing public education about the court and highlighting the court's achievements over the years. We will also pay tribute to the many men and women who have toiled to make our court the success that it is, not only regionally but internationally. As the year progresses we will update you on these activities. I encourage each and every one of you to become involved. As I said before, this is our court and therefore our moment of celebration! Ensure that you are a part of it!

In closing, I thank you all for your attention and I pray for God's guidance upon our region as we remain steadfast to the cause of justice and in our strides towards the achievement of our mission.

I thank you.