

GREETINGS

**FROM HON. ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE
Dorothy .C. Lightbourne, Q.C.
LAY MAGISTRATES ASSOCIATION OF JAMAICA
KINGSTON CHAPTER
ANNUAL BANQUET AT THE HILTON HOTEL**

Saturday, September 27,2008

(SALUTATIONS)

Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be asked to bring greetings in my capacity as Minister of Justice and Attorney General at this the Annual Banquet of the Lay Magistrates Association of Jamaica.

Thanks to the LMAJ for its kind invitation to participate in this occasion. It is always an honour to greet and have fellowship with you the Lay Magistrates who do so much to serve Jamaica.

Your contribution to the administration of justice over many years has demonstrated the value and importance of lay involvement in the justice system.

Our country owes you a tremendous debt of gratitude for, despite the many challenges we face as a nation, particularly given the high levels of crime and violence and the constraints within the Justice system. You continue to volunteer and make yourselves available for duty and service.

For that my ministry and indeed my government is extremely grateful.

You are an integral part of our communities and our justice system.

You help to give the ordinary citizen access to justice.

As you know we are currently in the process of reforming the Jamaican Justice System, and your 'limited' role as Justices of the Peace/ Lay Magistrates is to be expanded to include among other things –

- Jurisdiction over small claims court,
- Mediating in community justice tribunals and restorative justice....

Once again I ask that you avail yourselves of the training courses which will be conducted from time to time at the JTI.

This will allow you to be *au fait* with current procedures, processes and technologies in order to more efficiently and effectively discharge your duties and responsibilities.

I am pleased to inform you that between September 2007 and September 2008, two hundred and ninety five [295] Justices of the Peace received training and we expect the number to keep growing as we improve our training programmes and facilities.

I believe that as we continue to break new ground, in terms of transforming the justice system that has been ailing for so long, the importance of your role will become more evident, and the public will begin to recognize the value of your contributions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, one of the areas of emphasis, for 2008/2009 is the reduction of the backlog of criminal and civil cases in our courts.

Cabinet approval was granted last year to proceed with a comprehensive and multi-faceted backlog reduction strategy involving the judiciary, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) and other stakeholders in our justice system.

Just recently, both the Senate and the House of Representatives passed amendments to Judicature Supreme Court Act and the Judicature Appellate Jurisdiction Act to increase-

- the number of judges in the Supreme Court
- the number of masters [8]
- the number of judges of the Court of Appeal [12]

The Senate also passed an amendment to the Jury Act, which enables the Registrar of the Supreme Court to handle the serving of summons to jurors, removing this responsibility from the Commissioner of Police.

Because you as Lay Magistrates know the many complaints when the serving of summons were in the hands of the police.

There is also an amendment to widen the pool of persons from which jury lists may be compiled to include holders of Taxpayers Registration Numbers (TRNs).

In addition, as you may have heard we are adding at least four courtrooms at the Supreme Court to deal with criminal and gun related matters.

We anticipate that these backlog reduction strategies will result in the clearance of a significant portion of the 415 matters to be

prosecuted by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), and the more than 3,700 cases pending in the Gun Court.

We are making efforts to modernize the courts through the Court Automation Programme and have focused extensively on capacity building by training court staff to use case management software.

We have now obtained transcription hardware and software, which will allow real time display of the Court Reporter's transcripts on the judge's computer. We have also procured laptops for use by **all** judges in the Supreme Court.

The Ministry has also tendered for the procurement of computer supported recording devices for 79 courtrooms in the Resident Magistrate courts across the island. These devices will reduce the dependence of the judiciary on taking notes by hand.

We are currently working with a five-year infrastructure development plan to overcome the poor state of the island's courts. Several of our courts island wide have been refurbished and many are undergoing refurbishment. We intend to provide safe, clean, court buildings that are accessible to all stakeholders. That is our goal.

It is not an easy road and much more will need to be achieved to demonstrate improvement in the delivery of the high standard of justice, to which we all aspire.

And so tonight I encourage you to continue to work with us towards the new and shared vision for a justice system that is available, accessible, accountable, affordable, timely, courteous, respectful, flexible and competent.

I look forward to working with you much more closely, as we join hands and heart to deal, with the problems affecting the judicial system.

We need not only a transformed justice system but also we need a transformed society.

I appeal to you to support our efforts to stamp out corruption especially in the public sector, by refusing to sign documents that you know are invalid.

Jamaica is a signatory to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, and we have agreed to:

(a) We have agreed to promote and strengthen measures to prevent and combat corruption more efficiently and effectively;

(b) Promote, facilitate and support international cooperation and technical assistance in the prevention of and fight against corruption, including asset recovery;

(c) Promote integrity, accountability and proper management of public affairs and public property.

As you know, In the MOJ we have begun the process through the tabling of the Special Prosecutors' Act and Whistleblower legislations in Parliament. We call on your support in promoting public participation in these discussions, as well as, through our own examples of honesty, integrity and accountability.

On behalf of the Government let me express our deep appreciation for the tremendous contribution that you our Lay Magistrates continue to make to the delivery of justice in our nation as well as our best wishes to your executive and members.

Thank you again for the invitation and, on behalf of the ministry,
wish you a very enjoyable and successful evening.

Thank You