

**ADDRESS AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING  
OF THE RESIDENT MAGISTRATE'S COURT AND POLICE STATION  
(CAMBRIDGE), ST. JAMES  
BY  
ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE  
SENATOR THE HON. DOROTHY C. LIGHTBOURNE, Q.C.,  
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2008**

**SALUTATIONS**

1. The opening of this new court building is an achievement of great significance, not only for the residents of Cambridge, which I am told is the second largest town in the parish of St. James, but for all Jamaicans. This is so because this new infrastructure, the Court and Police Station represents another step towards access to justice for all.
2. The benefits which will flow to Cambridge and the surrounding communities demonstrate the importance of this infrastructure – which was constructed at a cost of \$65 million dollars.
3. First, the proximity of the court to your community will ensure that justice is within the reach of every person - farmer, domestic workers, business persons and the unemployed.
4. Second, the size of this new building offers the opportunity for two Courtrooms and other legal services to be housed under one roof.

And it is hoped that the new courtrooms will be used for Traffic matters the Special Coroners Courts, as you know we will be bringing on Special Coroners Courts which will help to ease the backlog of cases before the Coroners Court.

5. It is also expected that the assignment cases will be rationalised, and the Chief Justice alluded to it, to allow for matters from communities outside Cambridge to be tried here. The Cambridge Court will, as it previously did, serve this community as well as the communities of Anchovy, Catadupa, Ginger Hill and Seven Rivers.
6. There is a proposal at our Ministry for mediation services to be provided from this facility. And at this point I will say a little about the Community Justice Tribunals which we expect also to be operated out of this Court building.
7. In the government's manifesto pledges we gave a commitment to establish Community Justice Tribunals. Out of funding support from the Canadian-Caribbean Cooperation Fund we will be engaging consulting services to train Justices of the Peace, Social Workers and other community leaders from across the island.

8. Very shortly contact will be made with your community leaders so that the appropriate persons can be identified for training. These tribunals will be conducted by Justices of the Peace and other credible community leaders. They will serve to resolve disputes between citizens and will be heard with the consent of the disputing parties. It is intended to make the agreements that are derived from these tribunals enforceable by the courts.
  
9. Third, the new court will add to the rich heritage of Cambridge making it an even more attractive tourist site. Cambridge is an historic town and has been a thriving agricultural township with an emphasis on the growing of bananas and coffee and its economic activity was very rich during the days of the railway. Today, though the railway is not operational, the town still boasts the growth of bananas and coffee. I understand that tourists are still attracted to this community and the Court will add to that attraction.
  
10. In fact I enquired of the Permanent Secretary whether this was an heritage site, because it seems to me that it ought to be and he advised that it is being looked, at in view of the age and the historic background to this building.

11. Finally, it is hoped that the investment in this new hall of justice will send a strong signal to persons who continue to run afoul of the law. Justice in the Cambridge Court will be swift and impartial.
  
12. I am pleased to hear from the Police that the crime rate in this area is still relatively low. I am advised that the majority of cases that come before the court from these communities involve land disputes and domestic violence matters. And this really ties in with my hope that more mediation services will be conducted here because often domestic violence matters are really matters that will benefit from mediation and Community Tribunals. Although I would like to see those figures trending downwards, I encourage you to continue doing what you are doing and maintain crime at a minimum.
  
13. At the same time, I wish to encourage you to find more conciliatory ways to settle your disputes.
  
14. While we speak of the benefits and the prospects which this infrastructure brings with it, it is important for us to reflect on where we are coming from so that we can have a greater appreciation of where we are now.

15. The old building which housed the Court dated back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. A structural assessment of the building carried out in 2005 revealed that the building was not only unsafe, but was also a public health hazard.
16. In line with the move towards reform of the justice system, the decision was taken to construct a new facility. The new courthouse includes new RM courtroom and Chambers, new Court of Petty Sessions, with Chambers, Clerk of the Courts and Accountants offices as well as improved physical access to the courtrooms for those who are physically challenged. That's very important because that's the way we ought to go in all our public buildings. There will be ongoing improvements to the facilities even after today's opening.
17. I understand that there are some steps that are slippery, steps have been taken within the next two weeks to install non-slip tiles wherever there is slippage.
18. . Attorneys who practice in this court will also very soon have the benefit of facilities to conduct private interviews with their clients as well as appropriate restrooms. And that has always been a contention when I was a private practitioner, lack of restrooms at our Courthouse.

### **Other Projects in the Ministry of Justice**

19. For the fiscal period April – October, 2008, some \$86.36 million has been spent on the physical infrastructure of courts across the island. And although it doesn't look that way, when you see the state of the Courthouses, you can understand the state they were in before. The largest sums have been spent on Cambridge and Balaclava, representing \$23.4 and \$22.8 million respectively.
  
20. The National Commercial Bank has handed over to the Ministry of Justice the new Port Antonio Courthouse. Work is underway with the installation of the several fixtures, fittings, furniture and equipment. Approval has also been received from the National Contracts Commission for the construction of an access road. It is projected that the Court will commence by year end.
  
21. I will also say and I hope that as we move towards automation of our Courts, that we will also bring automation to these Courts, so that the Judges and RM's will be assisted, and will not have to go through long note takings, but that we will be putting the equipment in place for the trial of cases, so that evidence can be taken swiftly and accurately.

22. The new Resident Magistrate's Court in Balaclava is ninety (90%) percent complete and the court will commence sittings very early in the New Year. It is intended that the court in St. Elizabeth will also organise for more sittings to be held in Balaclava. It is also intended that the Traffic, Coroner's and Special Coroner will also sit at that location. This will allow the people of the communities to have their matters heard within their communities and reduce the need for travelling longer distances to Santa Cruz.
23. In accordance with my own commitment to reduce the backlog of cases in the courts, the Ministry, some of you may have heard this before, has secured the three Caucus Rooms at the Jamaica Conference Centre, thereby providing three additional criminal courtrooms at the Supreme Court.
24. Apart from the infrastructure blocks and cement, we are investing in our staff, the most critical factor to the success of our courts. Legislation has been passed to allow for an increase in the number of Judges of Appeal and Supreme Court Judges. Legislation has also been passed for an increase in the number of Masters in the Supreme Court. There is also provision for an increase in the number of Resident Magistrates, Prosecutors and other staff to

support this initiative. I am sure you would have noticed the advertisements for Judges and this is consistent with the commitment to improve the level of transparency in the appointment of Judges.

25. In keeping with this thrust, deliberate efforts are being made to increase physical space for the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. This will include accommodation for the Court Management Services the establishment of which has been approved by Cabinet. This entity will give the Chief Justice full charge of the budget for the courts.
26. Other buildings that have received attention include - Claremont, St. Ann's Bay, May Pen, Port Antonio, and Supreme Courts and Judges' residences.
27. Going forward it is planned to provide a new home for the Traffic and, Coroner's and Family Courts in Kingston. Construction of the new Morant Bay and Mandeville Courts are expected to commence in the new fiscal year. This month, I will be holding discussions with the Mayor of Black River to secure better facilities for the court there and I will also be spending a day in Montego Bay to have a site visit of the Montego Bay Court which from reports I have received, is

in a very bad condition. So that is our next major attention. Considerations were whether we look for, and Permanent Secretary and I were looking around for a new site for a new Courthouse, but we have not been very successful up to now to find lands suitable, or whether we see what we can do to rebuild refurbish and bring the Court up to satisfactory standards. This not just for our clients who use the Courthouse, but also for our Judges, Resident Magistrates and our Court staff.

28. I wish to express appreciation to the contractors for the work that has been done, in the same breath, I am also pleading with all contractors to perform on their contracts on time and at a satisfactory level as we continue with the work of refurbishing our Courthouses. We need to get it right in Jamaica and make the best use of the revenue that is provided.

29. I would like to thank all persons - litigants, Attorneys, the Police, members of the Judiciary, Justices of the Peace and Court staff - for their patience and cooperation in travelling all the way to Montego Bay for Court matters to be heard.

30. I wish to publicly express regret for the period of time that this Court has been closed and the inconvenience that was caused to your community.

31. Finally, let me implore you to take care of your court, as I look around the surroundings are very pleasant, grounds are pleasant, take care of it, the Permanent Secretary and I commit to a planned maintenance programme.

Thank you and God bless you.

**END**