



PRESS RELEASE

The Judiciary of Belize operationalizes the Caribbean Court of Justice's Academy for Law Needham's Point Declaration

13th May 2024

Chief Justice Honourable Mde. Louise Esther Blenman is pleased to announce that the Senior Courts of Belize have responded to the recommendations encapsulated by the Caribbean Court of Justice (C.C.J.) Academy for Law's "Needham Point Declaration on Criminal Justice Reform: Achieving A Modern Criminal Justice System" with the aim to reduce the backlogs in the criminal justice system.

The Office of the Chief Justice has established the Criminal Justice Board which is chaired by Honourable Chief Justice Mde. Louise Esther Blenman. The Criminal Justice Board is multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary which comprises representatives from Judges, Magistrates, Crown Counsel, Police, Defence Counsel, Attorney General's Chambers, Forensic Analysts, Social Workers, Prison, Church leaders and other representatives of the civic society. This inclusive and interdisciplinary approach ensures a comprehensive effort to address systemic challenges and enhance effectiveness and efficiency.

Acting in accordance with the mandate to operationalize the Needham Point Declaration within Belize and to reduce the backlog, the Criminal Justice Board has organized into nine sub-committees, each focused on specific aspects contributing to delays within the system. These sub-committees have diligently identified key issues and devised targeted solutions to pave the way for substantive change.

Recent submissions of reports from these sub-committees underscore the critical importance of continuous training across all sectors of the Criminal Justice System. Additionally, recommendations for legislative reforms, technological advancements, and structural organizational changes have been put forth to streamline processes and alleviate backlogs.

Exciting initiatives are already in motion, including the drafting of Sentencing Guidelines by the Sentencing Guidelines Committee, slated for release in the coming weeks. Moreover, the National Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee is set to pilot alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in criminal matters, marking a progressive step towards more efficient resolution processes.

In alignment with the recommendations from the Criminal Justice Board, the enactment of the **Criminal Procedure (Plea Discussion and Plea Agreement) Act 2024** is scheduled for June 3, 2024. Concurrently, the Judicial Education Institute of the Senior Courts of Belize will host a virtual training session on Saturday, May 25, 2024, to prepare stakeholders for the implementation of this Act.

Based on the reports from the Criminal Justice Board and the Senior Courts of Belize Judicial Education Institute's Needs Assessment Reports, the Judicial Education Institute recently hosted virtual training sessions on case management systems and e-litigation which have equipped judiciary personnel with essential skills, laying the groundwork for transformative change.

Looking ahead, the Judicial Education Institute of the Senior Courts of Belize is gearing up for a landmark event – the first-ever **Conference on Criminal Justice Reform: Achieving the C.C.J. Academy for Law Needham's Point Declaration** which is scheduled from September 2nd to September 6th, 2024, in Belize. This Conference aims to foster collaboration among stakeholders, reduce backlogs, and provide training to Judges, Magistrates, Prosecutors and Defence Counsel. Renowned jurists from the Caribbean and the Commonwealth together with other experts will form the distinguished faculty.

-End-