Let me begin by thanking everyone for their presence this morning, and for the tremendous interest demonstrated in what I consider to be a most important exercise.

In that latter context, let me add my special welcome to our distinguished facilitators from the National Centre for State Courts, Mr Kasparek, Mr Zastany, and Dr Straub, and to express my confidence that their combined expertise and experience in the Management of Courts in the sophisticated North American environment could only redound to what we in the Judiciary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago wish to be the output of this exercise, a cadre of staff whose capacity will be so enhanced, that our objective of transforming our Judiciary into a high performing, professional organisation will be much easier realisable.

And what better way to accelerate our way towards that goal than placing emphasis on the fundamentals of Court Management. After all the operation of the Courts are fundamental to our functions as a Judiciary, and over the years we have been taking steps to improve in that direction, with our customers, both external and internal, and at all levels – from those who seek justice to those who deliver justice – at the core of the transformation.

If we look at the history behind the transformation of Courts in the North American environment, and described in detail in the NCSC Document, *Achieving High Performance: A framework for Courts*, one finds that the driving forces over the years aren’t that dissimilar to the determinants of the change that we have been undertaking in Trinidad and Tobago.

The documents points out firstly, that in the 1960s and 1970s, jails were overflowing in the United States because defendants could not make bail. Recognition of the problem led to separate pre-trial release agencies, distinct from probation offices, springing up to help courts make more informed decisions on whether defendants had sufficient ties to the community to
warrant release on their own recognizance. Bail reform resulted from the work of new agencies that supplied information that courts had not previously assembled in any systematic manner.

Similarly, the alternative dispute resolution movement began in the 1980s as a reaction to what many considered overly complex and costly court procedures for dealing with many types of civil disputes. Specially trained mediators and arbitrators were hired to encourage negotiation between contending parties to resolve outstanding issues and avoid the time, cost and perhaps less satisfying results of traditional litigation.

In the 1990s, the NCSC document notes, problem solving courts were developed to deal with the problems underlying low-level criminal behaviour. A proliferation of these courts, for such cases as drug offenses, mental health issues, domestic violence, military veterans’ issues, and so forth has occurred. One motivation for directing some cases away from a regular calendar and to their own separate, designated track was to reduce recidivism and another was to provide needed services that might not result from traditional adjudication.

Here in Trinidad and Tobago, the issue of overflowing jails is almost a clichéd one, and bail reform as well as legislation that will eliminate preliminary inquiries has been on the agenda as priorities for some time now, and I dare say becoming closer to being reality.

Alternative Dispute Resolution via mediation is in fact a reality and the initial efforts in this connection have been highly successful. In fact the Mediation Board of Trinidad and Tobago has just last week organised a very successful symposium at which it was able to celebrate its achievements having registered and trained more than 80 mediators, and to further market the process and inculcate the culture as part of the Trinidad and Tobago practice, as a way of saving time, and cost and less satisfying results of traditional litigation.

When it comes to the creation of special purpose courts, the Family Court pilot has been so successful as a problem solving court that we have recently been given the green light by Cabinet to fully operationalise this Court as a permanent arm of the Judiciary of Trinidad and
Tobago, and to begin roll out from the St George West jurisdiction to other parts of the country.
We are planning to begin the Family Court expansion starting in San Fernando where we have acquired property for that purpose. Another initiative in this direction of special purpose courts will be the establishment of a drug treatment court, initially as a pilot and possibly in San Fernando as well. This court will seek to provide needed services to persons in low level criminal behaviour because of addiction. We have also just recently held an important training seminar in this regard, and we hope to have the pilot up and running during the first quarter of the New Year.

As important as all these concepts are, the pre-requisite to all this is effective management, hence the importance of this particular workshop over the next few days in which the fundamentals of court management will be in focus, applying the High Performance Court Framework which has been developed by the National Centre for State Court.

Without wishing to steal the thunder of the facilitators, the perspectives from which this framework was constructed are quite interesting indeed, and are closely aligned to the very questions we have been asking these past few months in the continuing development of our transformational objectives and plans. These include:

- the customer perspective which asks how should we treat all cases and participants in the legal process.
- The internal operating perspective which asks what does a well functioning court do to excel at managing its entire caseload.
- The innovation perspective with the focus on how can court personnel learn to adapt to new circumstances and challenges, and finally
- the social value perspective which asks what is a court responsibility to the funding and public bodies.
With questions like these being tackled during your deliberations over the next few days, this seminar cannot be anything other than a most interesting and invaluable exercise to all participants, and surely a boon for the efforts of the Judiciary at becoming a high performance, professional organisation.

I know it will be a successful exercise. I am confident you will enjoy it, and I am certain it will redound to the benefit of not only the Judiciary, but to the many citizens who access our services. I thank you.