Trinidad and Tobago’s Chief Justice joins CARICOM Chief Justices in signing a MOU with the Supreme Court of Nigeria and NCSC for a new CMIS.

Trinidad and Tobago’s Chief Justice joins Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Chief Justices in signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Supreme Court of Nigeria and National Center for State Courts of the United States of America (NCSC) for a new automated case management information system (CMIS), saying the new system has the potential for significant savings in operational costs along with greater process efficiencies for the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago.

The three CARICOM Jurisdictions, the Nigerian Supreme Court and the NCSC on February 2nd 2016, signed the MOU for technical assistance to design, develop, and implement a new CMIS modelled after the indigenously developed Nigerian Judiciary’s CMIS for implementation in the signatory CARICOM nations. The CARICOM Chief Justices namely: the Hon. Mr. Justice Ivor Archie of Trinidad and Tobago, the Hon. Mr. Justice Marston Gibson of Barbados, and the Hon. Mme. Justice Dame Janice Pereira of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States signed the agreement at the headquarters of the National Judicial Council of Nigeria in Abuja on Tuesday (February 2nd 2016). The Chief Justice of the Bahamas, the Hon. Mr Justice Hartman Longley also witnessed the signing. The Bahamian Judiciary will consider the Nigerian CMIS solution for possible future implementation.

Speaking with the Nigerian Press, Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago, the Hon. Mr Justice Ivor Archie said that shared common law systems and development goals meant that the challenges faced by Nigerian and CARICOM jurisdictions in the administration of justice are similar, and so the partnership “seems quite a natural fit”. Calling the occasion a signal moment for the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago since the initiative directly supports one of its key initiatives - a Juvenile Court, Chief Justice Archie noted that “The Judiciary’s capacity to provide speedy and effective access to justice can be greatly facilitated by the use of an automated case management information system (CMIS) tailored to the needs of the children in our courts. Any good CMIS should allow for efficient tracking of cases and timely access to relevant information to support both short and longer term decision making. A good CMIS will also provide the platform for better case flow management and facilitate sharing of information between the court and its stakeholders in the Criminal Justice System. Today’s signing brings us closer to the realisation of that vision.”

Chief Justice Archie also indicated that the initiative with the Supreme Court of Nigeria and the NCSC will also allow Trinidad and Tobago to meaningfully tackle another of its key strategic goals especially in the light of the current revenue realities of the country that is, lowering the cost of its operations. “For twenty years or so, we have utilised an off-the-shelf Case Management Information System solution...
While this off-the-shelf CMIS has helped to reduce administrative and procedural delays, improve the ease and efficiency of our communications with clients on their matters before the Court, and contributed to the speedier disposition of matters, in recent years, growth in the volume of matters before the courts, in addition, the complexity of some of those cases has presented us with some limitations with regard to the software’s capability and more so suitability. Additionally, restrictive administrative arrangements have severely limited our ability to customise and maintain the software to suit our local needs. Increasing annual expenses (by as much as six per cent year on year), associated with the vendor’s support of the solution have posed a challenge to achieving one of our strategic goals—reducing the costs of our operations. To date we spend approximately USD$176,000 annually to maintain the system (primarily in licensing fees), and licenses for use are paid on a per user basis thus limiting the potential for expansion. That's USD$176,000 for a system we neither own nor can fully customise to suit our needs! This Memorandum of Understanding represents a major shift in our approach in the search for ICT solutions for our Courts. Once we have ironed out the terms of our cooperation, no longer will Trinidad and Tobago be at the mercy of vendors with proprietary programs, certainly not for a CMIS. This strategic partnership presents us an opportunity to design and develop an ICT solution specific to our needs using the existing Nigerian Case Management Information System as the base. The implication for us is the realisation of significant savings in operational costs along with greater process efficiencies.”

Addressing the gathering at the Signing Ceremony, His Lordship the Chief Justice of Nigeria the Hon. Justice Mahmud Mohammed GCON, said the Nigerian initiative to develop its own CMIS began in 2011, arising out of a discussion by distinguished jurists at the 24th World Jurist Association Congress held in Prague, Czech Republic. The Nigerian Judiciary partnered with NCSC and Microsoft International to develop a solution specific to the Nigerian case management needs. His Lordship added that “It is certainly due to providence and the dint of hard work put in by members of the [National Judicial] Committee [for IT], its technical team, the NCSC and our various partners that this innovative software has become a functional reality, which, if fully integrated into our Courts will transform the Judiciary for posterity.”...No doubt I am delighted to see that it is indeed worthy of adaptation in your Lordships' Judiciaries and we look forward to working in partnership with your respective jurisdictions in this regard.” His Lordship also indicated that it was his sincere hope that the collaboration between commonwealth nations would go a long way towards “our collective dream of a sound justice delivery system. In this regard, I believe that technology will greatly enhance our ability to bridge the gap between our aspirations and our actualizations.”

The Caribbean Chief Justices toured the High Court, Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court of Nigeria and received demonstrations of how the Nigerian CMIS functioned and improved the work flow, administrative and procedural operations in the Nigerian Judiciary.

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For further information kindly contact:
Alicia Carter-Fisher
Court Protocol and Information Manager
Telephone: 628-8529/223-1060 exts. 2419, e-mail: cpiu@ttlawcourts.org