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Chambers
Director of Public Prosecutions,
P.O. Box 1031,
Georgetown,
Guyana

24th January, 2024

DPP'S CHAMBERS – BENCH BOOK LAUNCHED

Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), Mrs. Shalimar Ali-Hack, SC has commended the JURIST Project under the auspices of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) for the publication of a Bench Book which will serve as a practical and accessible guide for magistrates in various jurisdictions around the Caribbean Region to efficiently execute their functions in a timely manner.

In brief remarks at a simple but significant ceremony to launch the Bench Book in January 2024, the DPP welcomed the publication which she said will improve the capacity of magistrates and prosecutors as well.

The Bench Book contains guidelines, commentaries and statements of law which are intended to be used in the conduct of trials and in judicial decision-making and clarifications on complex areas of procedure. It will enable magistrates to deliver immediate oral reasons for their decisions and help them to give sound decisions and also assist with the expeditious disposal of cases.

The DPP reasoned that the magistrates' courts have a heavy burden and magistrates need to have a command of the law and have readily available, all necessary assistance to deal with all charges in an efficient and timely manner.

She noted that the delay in the hearing of cases results in a travesty of justice; accused persons and victims alike do not enjoy their constitutional right under Article 144 of the Constitution, to have the case being afforded a fair hearing within a reasonable time, when there are delays. Too many cases, she said, are dismissed because witnesses do not testify, some through frustration of having to attend court several times and not being able to testify.

The Bench Book which is comprehensively laid out for the different Caribbean Jurisdictions is seen as a tool for magistrates to find relevant laws, practice and procedure. Some of the relevant areas include, Search Warrant, Sworn Declarations, Duplicitous Joinder of parties and charges, Defects and Amendments of charges, Guidelines for dealing with vulnerable witnesses including those in sexual offences, Admissibility of Evidence, Sentencing and Committal proceedings. What is especially liked about the Bench Book is that the legislation is stated as well as case law for the different topics.