

Remarks of the Chief Justice, Hon. Sir Ian Winder on the Opening of the Legal year 2026

Mr. President, My Lords, My Ladies, judicial officers, including former Chief Justices and Presidents of the Court of Appeal and other retired judicial officers, Mr. Attorney-General, President of the Bahamas Bar Association and members of Bar Council, Counsel and Attorneys. I acknowledge the presence in the Court of former Prime Ministers Rt Honourable Hubert Ingraham, the Rt Honourable Perry Christie and Her Excellency Smita Rosetti, British High Commissioner.

As Head of the Judiciary, I have the pleasure and duty of welcoming you and to thank you for taking the time to share this occasion.

Today we mark the opening of another legal year with the traditional special sitting of the Court. While the Supreme Court Act mandates the commencement of the law term, on the second Wednesday in January, our English inherited traditions have included the convening of a ceremonial sitting of the Court. The occasion provides a forum for all aspects of the legal system, the Bar, the Executive and the Courts to account to the people of The Bahamas for our stewardship in the past year and to forecast plans for the coming year.

I continue to express my thanks and gratitude to the Almighty God for His abundant mercies and for the honor to have been given the opportunity to serve The Bahamas as her Chief Justice. I remain humbled in this moment and ever thankful for the support of my family, colleagues and friends.

Acknowledgements

The week began with the Annual Red Mass Service at St Francis Xavier Cathedral on Sunday past where we received the payers and fellowship of *His Grace, the Most Reverend Patrick Pinder, Archbishop of the Catholic Diocese of Nassau*, invoking the guidance of the Holy Spirit on the work of the courts. This morning, we gratefully received the spirited charge of the Rt Reverend Laish Boyd, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese in the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands. We wish to thank the Very Reverend Dwight Rolle, the new Dean of Christ Church Cathedral and his team at the Cathedral for so graciously accommodating us for our annual official service this morning.

I am pleased to recognize the presence of Deputy Commissioner of Police, Anthony Rolle. The Royal Bahamas Police Force is integral to the success of these proceedings. Not only for our general and personal security and the facilitation of our procession by the Road Traffic Division, but also for the usual excellent presentation of the guard of honour by the Internal Security Division accompanied by the Police Force Band. I, therefore, through you Mr Deputy Commissioner, wish to express our appreciation to the Commissioner of Police and the Royal Bahamas Police Force for their able assistance this morning and for all they do for the Courts and the Administration of Justice during the course of the year.

Today, the Deputy Commissioner attends these proceedings as the Acting Provost Marshal for the Court and for this we welcome his presence sitting with us, on the dais.

Appointments, retirements and farewells

In January 2025 the Honourable Mr. Justice Milton Evans, took the leadership reins of the Court of Appeal, upon the retirement of the Honourable Justice Jon Isaacs. The Court of Appeal held a special sitting in January 2025 to say farewell to Mr. Justice Isaacs, after a long and distinguished career on the bench, and simultaneously to welcome President Evans into office.

In the year since President Evans has been involved in the leadership of the judiciary his impact has already been felt. I thank him for his counsel over the past year and continue to wish him well in his tenure as President of the highest domestic court in The Bahamas.

Since last year's opening, Senior Justices Deborah Fraser and Gregory Hilton have demitted office as Supreme Court justices and have joined the Court of Appeal Bench. Both Justices Fraser and Hilton have had stellar tenures on the Supreme Court bench and I have every expectation that their service in this higher office will likewise be stellar. While we will miss them on the Supreme Court bench, we look forward to their contribution to the work of the Court of Appeal.

In November 2025, the Honourable Justice Maureen Crane Scott proceeded on pre-retirement leave in advance of her attaining the mandatory retirement age in February 2026. Justice Crane-Scott joined the Court of Appeal from the Barbados judiciary, just over ten years ago, and will leave her mark on Bahamian

jurisprudence. She has authored many landmark decisions during her tenure. We sincerely thank her for her contributions and wish her well in her retirement.

The Honourable Justice Indra Charles will also attain the mandatory retirement age in the spring of this year. Justice Charles joined the Court of Appeal in 2023 following an 11-year tenure on the Supreme Court, and prior to that, eleven (11) years on the Eastern Caribbean High Court. Her service to the jurisdiction has been extraordinary. She is prolific judgment writer whose judgments are always well thought out and delivered timely. She too, will leave with her mark etched in the history of the jurisprudence of The Bahamas. We were therefore pleased to learn of her appointment to the Court of Appeal of the Turks and Caicos Islands in October of last year. It is hoped that in due course an opportunity will arise to give a fitting tribute to this hard-working jurist.

At the end of last year, we welcomed Cheryl Bazard KC to the Supreme Court. Justice Bazard comes to the bench after a career shaped by the public and private bars, the financial services industry and the foreign service. We congratulate Justice Bazard and look forward to her service on the Supreme Court.

Renaldo Toote, who had been acting as Supreme Court Registrar since November 2024, was confirmed as the Registrar of the Supreme Court on 1 December 2025. We wish him well in this new role and look forward to his continued dedicated service.

Since last year's opening, Charlton Smith was confirmed in his appointment as Deputy Chief Magistrate for the Northern Region. Carolyn Vogt Evans was appointed Acting Deputy Chief Magistrate. Shaka Serville was appointed Acting Assistant Chief Magistrate. Petrocilli Edwards, Uel Johnson and Abigail Farrington were appointed as Magistrates. We congratulate them all on their appointments.

In May 2025 we said farewell to Assistant Chief Magistrate Subusola Swain who was appointed as a Vice President of the Industrial Tribunal. During this year we will bid farewell to Magistrates Samuel Mckinney, Sandradee Gardiner and James Moxey who have all proceeded on pre-retirement leave during 2025. I wish to record our thanks and appreciation for their service to the Magistracy and to wish them well in the next phases of their lives.

Magistrate Edwards, who only joined us last year, and presided over one of the Civil Court, has been tapped to be the first Registrar of Lands in the newly formed Land Registry. He will demit office as a Magistrate effective 19 January 2026. We wish him well in this new pioneering role. Assistant Registrar Jonathan Deal will be seconded to the Magistrates Court and preside over the Civil court, in the short term.

We also said farewell during the last Court year to Judicial Research Counsels Rayshon Deleveaux, Krystian Butler, Cherie Butler, Victoria Morris and Shaquille Dean who have all moved to the private sector.

Criminal Courts

In 2025 we continued to make deliberate efforts to engage in Criminal Justice Reform. In August 2025, the Bahamas' Criminal Justice Board was formed. A Criminal Justice Board is a recognized multi-agency forum that brings together key stakeholders across the criminal justice system to improve strategic oversight, coordination, and system-wide performance. Precedents for Criminal Justice Boards exist in several jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom and Belize. The primary focus of the Criminal Justice Board is to ensure the implementation of key reforms and to resolve delays in the court system. Members of the Board are expected to work together in an effort to improve access to justice. Membership in the board includes myself as Chairman, the President of the Court of Appeal and other key members of the judiciary, the Commissioner of Police, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the President of the Bar Association and key members of the private bar, the Commissioner of Prisons, the Director of Social Services and the heads of the forensics/pathology units. Strategic committees have been established to focus on key areas, choke points and the weaknesses in the criminal justice system. The Board and the subcommittees have been meeting regularly since August, and collectively we are identifying challenges and finding solutions to long-standing problems.

Contrary to the views expressed by some, and repeated by others, I am satisfied that all the stakeholders in the criminal justice system, especially the dedicated judges of the criminal division, are acutely aware of the enormity of their duty under the Constitution and the effect that delays have in the adjudication of criminal

disputes. To suggest that there is a culture of complacency is unfortunate, as it reflects a lack of awareness of the challenges facing an overburdened system or simply ignores the strident efforts being made to address them. My experience over the past six months, in dealing directly with the stakeholders on Criminal Justice Board, has given me every confidence that there is a recognition of the urgency of the moment and the zeal to meet these systemic challenges for the benefit, not only of the accused, but the victims' class and our community.

In 2025 the Supreme Court (Trial by Judge Alone) Act 2024, The Supreme Court Amendment Act 2024 and the Supreme Court (Criminal Case Management) (Amendment) Rules 2024 came into force. The trial by judge alone legislation, you would recall, offers the opportunity to elect a non-jury trial. The Criminal Case Management Rules promote more efficient and effective case management in criminal matters by providing for the Defense Statement and a mechanism for Pre-trial Evidentiary Hearings. Defendants are now routinely complying with the new rules and are filing Defence Statements as required. However, it remains too early to evaluate the full impact of these enactments on the criminal justice system. Embracing change and changing culture is not always and easy ask and it often takes time for cultural shifts to occur. The judges in the criminal division , however, remain committed to promoting more effective and efficient case management.

Bench book

The long awaited Bahamian Criminal Bench Book was finally completed at the end of 2025. The 500-page electronic version (or E-Bench Book) was released to the

judiciary in December and will be made available for wider circulation. The printed version is expected to be available in February 2026 and we hope to have a formal launch thereafter. The Bench book is designed for judicial officers presiding over criminal matters and distills procedural norms, evidentiary standards, and sentencing frameworks into a coherent and accessible reference. It is therefore a useful resource for the practitioners at the public and private bars as well. Much of material in the Bench Book was contributed by our own judicial officers and reflects the evolving jurisprudence of our courts, the constitutional imperatives, the statutory architecture of our criminal law, and the ethical considerations that underpin fair trial rights. Whether addressing bail applications, jury directions, or sentencing considerations, the Bench Book aims to support consistency, clarity, and judicial independence. Professional assistance in editing the publication was provided by the Caribbean Association of Judicial Officers (CAJO) under the able guidance of Justice Peter Jamadar of the Caribbean Court of Justice. I wish to formally extend my gratitude to the CAJO, to all of the contributors to the Bench Book and to Justice Renae McKay for her tireless efforts in shepherding this project to conclusion. I would also like to recognize, former Judicial Research Counsel, Attorney Shaquille Dean who also assisted Justice McKay. The Bench Book is a product with which we can all be proud.

Sentencing Guidelines

The Bahamas' first ever Sentencing are nearly a reality. The Sentencing Guidelines Commission is nearing the completion of its work, having just released

the Guidelines for consultation to the members of the Bar. The Guidelines include general principles of sentencing as well as specific guidelines for violent offences; for sexual offences; for drug offences; and for firearm offences. The Guidelines have now been released for wider consultation to the members of the Bar and will be shortly followed by comprehensive training sessions, for the entire stakeholder community. Following consultation, the Hon. Attorney General has given his assurance that the enabling legislation will be placed before parliament to give formal effect to these guidelines.

The value in sentencing guidelines is that they promote consistency, fairness, and transparency in the criminal justice system by providing a structured framework for judges to determine appropriate sentences for criminal offenses. More importantly, where the accused and his attorneys are aware of the ranges of sentences open to him, the opportunity for plea bargaining and early guilty pleas are enhanced.

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the members of the Commission, led by its chairman retired Chief Justice, Sir Michael Barnett. The other members of the Commission include Justice of Appeal Bernard Turner, Senior Justice Cheryl Grant Thompson, Chief Magistrate Roberto Reckley, Director of Public Prosecutions Cordell Frazier, Bar Representatives Miranda Adderley and Stanley Rolle, Rev. Carla Culmer and Assistant Director of the Department of Rehabilitative/Welfare Services, Ms. Sonia Saunders. Court of Appeal Registrars Wallace-Whitfield and Richards served as secretaries and

research counsel to the Commission. I also wish to record my thanks to the United Kingdom Consultants Attorneys, Parvais Jabbar and Richard Thomas KC, and their teams, who continue to assist with this project.

New Criminal Court

In March we will introduce an additional judge to the Criminal Division to provide some additional capacity. Chief Magistrate Roberto Reckley has been appointed to Act as a Supreme Court Justice to build out the new Court, effective 1 March 2026.

Civil Divisions

During 2025, the Supreme Court Rules Committee passed several rules to aid in the administration of the civil justice system:

Supreme Court (Provost Marshal Fee) Rules, 2025, which came into effect on 3 March 2025, now prescribes the fees to be paid to the provost marshal by litigants who utilize these services for the execution of writs of execution.

Supreme Court (Enforcement of Orders and Awards of the Industrial Tribunal) (Amendment) Rules, 2025 which came into effect on 1 July 2025 facilitates awards of the Industrial Tribunal being seamlessly made orders of the Supreme Court.

We also passed the *Matrimonial Causes (Amendment) Rules, 2025*. The amendment updates the existing Rules, including making the Supreme Court (Civil Procedure) Rules 2022 the default rules, in place of the now repealed Rules of the Supreme Court. The amendment came into effect on 1 July 2025. The amendment

also enables for a more simplified process in the hearing of undefended or uncontested matrimonial causes.

The applications for dissolution of divorces, in uncontested matters, can now be heard on the papers, (ie) without petitioners having to attend in person. These new rules, it is hoped, will expedite the process of hearing and concluding uncontested divorces and alleviate litigants of the indignity of reliving matrimonial trauma in cases where the evidence is not being disputed.

Commercial Court

Beginning in February 2026, we will take a decisive step toward the formal establishment of a Commercial Court.

The Attorney General's has already pledged his full support to develop the necessary infrastructure to support this specialized court. The government has acquired a building on Charlette Street which is intended be the home of the new commercial court. The building, however, still needs to be outfitted for use as a Court.

A select committee made up of judges and practitioners will be convened to review and refine the draft rules, which have been proposed to govern the Court's operations. In the interim, a de facto Commercial Court will be constituted, utilizing existing rules and courtroom facilities. It will be staffed by the judges currently assigned to the Commercial Division, together with an acting judge drawn from a roster of King's Counsel. The acting commercial judges will each serve on a three-month rotation, beginning 4 February 2026.

I am pleased to confirm that Gail Lockhart-Charles KC, Raynard Rigby KC, and Robert Adams KC have already committed to participate in this rotation, ensuring that the Court will benefit from their expertise and distinguished service.

It is expected that this new court will significantly advance our effort to strengthen the administration of justice in commercial matters, providing greater efficiency, predictability, and confidence for all who engage in this work.

Probates

The probate and administration of estates process is a crucial aspect of our legal system. We appreciate that delays can affect the administration of estates, conveyancing, accounts receivable to creditors, and even the maintenance of minors. We are conscious of the complaints concerning the delays involved in this process. The back and forth between the probate registry and applicants, concerning corrections and the need for additional material.

The judiciary has developed an E-probate platform, which is in the final stages of testing, which will provide an electronic portal for the making of applications for grants of representation. Users on the platform will be asked a series of questions and allowed to upload supporting documents during the process. The platform will harness the power of Artificial Intelligence and allow users to track the progress of their applications. It is within this context that our E-probate platform aims to bring about a transformative change by streamlining the workflow and providing an accountable probate and administration of estates process.

Once implemented, it will represent a significant leap forward in our efforts to dispense justice efficiently and equitably. The platform is expected to be in operation before the end of the first quarter.

Delayed judgments

In 2025 we made considerable strides in clearing the backlog of delayed judgments. While strides have been made, we are not where we want to be and we do acknowledge that more work remains to be done to maintain reasonable time standards by individual judges. In the face of the pressures of the workload, these efforts remain a work in progress, and we are committed to achieving the goal of timely delivery of judgments.

Generative AI

The Courts, like every other institution, has had to face the impact of generative AI. On 5 November 2025 I issued Practice Direction # 3 of 2025 to provide a guide to the responsible use of Generative AI in Court proceedings. As other courts have had to do, I expect that the Practice Direction will have to be amended from time to time to keep pace with this rapidly evolving science. The Practice Direction was drafted by a committee which included Justices of Appeal Gregory Smith and Bernard Turner, Justices Renae McKay and Justice Andrew Forbes and JRC Courtney Martin. The AI Committee considered international and regional models before settling on what we considered would be best suited for The Bahamas at this time. I wish to thank each of them for their contribution to this project.

Mediation

The work on the Mediation Center at the Bernard Road has not progressed as timely as we had hoped but the work has moved nearer to completion. It is hoped that this could be completed by the end of the Spring and made available for operation by the courts and allow the Court to implement its court connected mediation program.

New Supreme Court fees

Upon conducting a comprehensive review of Supreme Court fees, a sub-committee of the Court Services Council successfully recommended to the Rules Committee a proposal for the adjustment of Supreme Court fees. These new fees, approved by the Ministry of Finance and embodied in *The Supreme Court (Fee) Rules 2025*, took effect on 1 January 2026. Supreme Court fees had not been adjusted in almost 20 years notwithstanding the increased costs of living, the explosion in civil litigation, the investment in technology and infrastructure, the significant increased demand for state funded legal aid and the increased operational costs. The increases are modest and designed to ensure that access to justice is by no means impeded.

Magistrates Courts

In September 2025 a second full daytime Civil Magistrates Court, presided over by Assistant Chief Magistrate Derrance Rolle Davis, was introduced to complement the Civil Night Court presided over by Magistrate Myles Parker. It is hoped that this will further streamline the civil litigation processes in the Magistrate Court and alleviate the burden on Supreme Court schedules. The accommodation for the

new Civil Court was facilitated by the relocation of the two magistrates engaged in family and domestic work from the Nassau Street Complex to the Bernard Road Family Court Complex.

This relocation also facilitated the conversion of the Firearms Court, presided over by Magistrate Lennox Coleby, into a full-time court. The Firearms Court had previously only operated between the hours of 1pm to 5pm due to space constraints. This court has proven extremely effective in dealing quickly with simple possession cases.

Appeals from the Magistrates Court to the Supreme Court.

During 2026 we intend to bring back the system of call overs concerning magistrates appeals to the Supreme Court. Our records show that there are a considerable number of outstanding magistrates' appeals which have not moved to conclusion or are not being managed to a resolution. We will revamp our system of handling these appeals. This is expected to entail early intervention with the parties to ensure that the record is available for the hearing of the appeal.

Judicial Education

During 2025, the Bahamas Judicial Education Institute conducted several key training initiatives beginning with the Annual Judicial Officers' Training which was conducted over two days on 6 - 7 January 2025 under the theme, "*Equipped to Dispense Justice – Judicial Competencies and Wellbeing*". Judicial officers considered a myriad of topics which were directed by local and regional

presenters. Later in the year judicial officers also benefited from training on the legal search engine, Vlex and its new AI search tool, Vincent, Gender Equality & Justice training and DNA Evidence training. The Institute also facilitated training for our support staff. An upskilling training course for Court Reporters, training for criminal court clerks (now called judicial support officers) and a week of orientation for new staff.

Other initiatives of the Institute included observances of the inaugural *International Day for Judicial Wellbeing* on 25 July 2025, where they organized health checks across the various courts in Abaco, Grand Bahama and New Providence. 30-minute movement sessions were offered for staff members encouraging physical activity as a complement to mental wellness.

Judicial officers were afforded the opportunity to attend several training programs and conferences overseas in 2025. These included the ILEA training course in El Salvador; The Commonwealth Lawyers Association conference in Malta, The Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association Conference in Banjul, The Gambia; The International Association of Women Judges Biennial Conference in Cape Town, South Africa; The Fraud, Asset Tracing and Recovery Conference in Miami, Florida; and, Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Regional Law Conference, in Grenada.

I wish to thank Justices Darville Gomez and Card Stubbs for the leadership of the Institute over the past year.

Capital Works

Capital works upgrades continued to the judiciary's plant in New Providence during 2025. The Supreme Court Annex II (commonly called the swift justice building) and the Hansard Building benefitted from upgrades.

At the end of January 2026, we look forward to the relocation of the Civil Registry from its current location on George Street, to premises on the ground floor of 50 Shirley Street which had previously been occupied by The Registrar General's Department. A complete refit of the space was done to accommodate a new and improved civil registry. 50 Shirley Street, you would recall, was acquired by the Government and is being incorporated into the new Supreme Court Complex. Demolition of the Rodney Bain Building is expected to commence during the course of this month. You may have noticed the erecting of fencing around the structure to begin the demolition process.

In July we witnessed the groundbreaking of the new judicial virtual court facility or remote court, at the Bahamas Department of Corrections. This facility will serve not only as a courtroom, but as a bridge—connecting the correctional system directly to the judiciary while reducing the logistical burdens on law enforcement, legal counsel, and detainees. It will ease security concerns, enhance scheduling flexibility, and provide for timely adjudication without unnecessary delay.

When completed, this facility will impact every aspect of the court system, from the Court of Appeal to the lay Magistrates Courts in the Family Islands. The Remote Court will span approximately 19,000 sq. ft. It will house 2 physical courts and

judges' chambers administration offices, soundproof booths for virtual arraignments, booths for attorney-client conferences, state of the art video communications and adequate holding cells.

Judicial Complaints

There have been much public discussions concerning the ability to make complaints relative to judicial officers. I preface my remarks in this area by pointing out that the constitution circumscribes the means for the disciplining of judicial officers. It is the Judicial and Legal Services Commission which receives and manages such complaints. It has always been open to concerned parties to make complaints to the Judicial & Legal Services Commission concerning judicial and legal officers, and this has occurred. The Bar President and I have had discussions on the issue.

In light of the concerns expressed, the Commission has determined to establish a more structured process within the existing framework. We will create a judicial complaints form, which will be available for download from the judiciary website. When engaged fully, the Complaint Form could be submitted to the Judicial & Legal Services Commission directly by uploading them to a link on the judiciary's website. A complaints subcommittee of the Commission, chaired by Justice of Appeal Bernard Turner, will consider complaints. The Subcommittee, upon receipt of a complaint, will, where the circumstances warrant, invite a response from judicial officer concerned or may request further information from the complainant. Where warranted, the subcommittee may conduct further investigations and make

recommendations for such disciplinary action as may be available under the Constitution and the Judicial and Legal Services Commission Regulations. The new process is expected to be launched by the end of January.

The Court Services Council

On 1 July 2025 the Court Services Council completed its transition year and officially appointed its first staff members. Many public officers from across the three levels of the court system accepted offers of employment and opted to join the new entity. In advance of the 1 July 2025 deadline, the Court Services Council approved its Human Resources Policies, Post Qualifications and Salary Scales for staff. As contemplated by the legislation, transferred staff members received enhanced salaries and benefits packages. In addition to the transferred public officers the Court Services Council had to engage new members of staff to replace the staff we lost and to support the new areas of responsibility under the legislation. I wish again to thank the staff members who are no longer with us for their contribution to the judiciary over the years.

I wish to publicly thank those members who chose to remain with the judiciary and to help us build out a new judiciary, fit for a modern age.

During 2025 the Court established its first statistics department. Miss Daniella Mohammed, was appointed to the post of Statistician, and she has been in the process of building out her department.

In the past year the Council strengthened its senior management. Ms. Charmaine Deleveaux joined the Council as the Chief Financial Officer in January 2025 and

has been building an effective finance and accounting department. In February 2025 the Director of Court Services, Ms. Mildred Bodie, assumed the reins as Acting Chief Executive Officer of the Council. Mr. Laron Neely joined the Council as Acting Director of Court Services in August 2025. The Council has been intentional in focusing on staff morale and welfare. I truly commend senior management and all staff members of the Council for their work during the past year.

Director of Security Steven Seymour will leave the judiciary in May of this year. As the Court's first Director of Security, Mr Seymour was tasked with building out the Court's security department. This was a task which he executed most ably, during his three-year tenure with the Court. The Court's security force capacity and infrastructure have developed considerably under his guidance. I wish to record our sincere appreciation to Mr Seymour and wish him well in his future endeavours.

Conference of Heads of Judiciary

As Chairman of the Conference of Heads of Judiciary of the Caribbean I was pleased to host the annual conference between 18-21 June 2025. The Conference brought together eleven (11) Judiciaries in the Caribbean under the theme, "*Judiciaries in Transition*". The meeting provided a forum for the promotion of fellowship, understanding and functional cooperation for the enhancement of the administration of justice within the jurisdiction of each member state. It also provided an opportunity to examine judicial problems and to arrive at better solutions to them. Topics discussed included: Judicial leadership; Execution of

strategic plans; Constitutional and Administrative implications of delayed judgments; Judicial Administration Models in the Caribbean; and Drafting an AI Policy/Guidance for judiciaries. Attendees included the Chief Justices of Barbados; Belize, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, Jamaica the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago and The Turks and Caicos Islands, the Chancellor of Guyana, The President of the High Court of Suriname, and the President of the Caribbean Court of Justice.

I again express my gratitude to the local organizing committee for their wonderful work on successfully hosting this important conference.

Annual Report

I commend to you the 2025 Annual Report which covers the work of the Courts during the past year. It also contains important information and statistics about the work and operations of the Courts. As usual, it will be available in a digital format on the Courts Website and in hard copy. This year's annual report is historic as, for the first time, it has merged with the annual report of the Court of Appeal. It therefore presents a unified report of the work of all aspects of the court system in 2025.

The Court Services Act which merged the financial and administrative arrangements of all three levels of the Court into the Court Services Council has facilitated this unification. This avoids duplication of resources and allows for the benefit of some economies of scale. I wish to formally register my thanks and

appreciation to the team responsible for preparing the Annual Report spearheaded by Registrars Renaldo Toote and Kristina Wallace Whitfield.

I should also like to extend my thanks to the teams responsible for the enormous work done in bringing off today's proceedings. Acting CEO Bodie, Acting Director of Court Services Neely, Rajah Smith, Darrenique Smith, Registrar Toote and their teams. I also single out the staff in my chambers, Nolan Scavella, Curtis Adderley and Geofricka Hepburn.

To the various media outlets, Bahamas Information Services, Our News and ZNS; Justices Dianne Stewart and Ruth Bowe Darville and Mrs Allyson Gibson Maynard for allowing our traditions to be shared with a wider audience.

Conclusion

As I conclude, I wish to thank my colleagues in the several vital Boards that administers the business of the courts for their work and dedication to the judiciary and the justice system during 2025.

The Judicial and Legal Services Commission, Justice of Appeal Bernard Turner, Father James Moultrie, Mrs Christel Sands-Feaste and Mr Andre Rahming.

The Board of Directors of the Court Services Council: President Evans, Justice Guillimina Archer Minns, Chief Magistrate Roberto Reckley, Registrar Renaldo Toote, Bar President, Kahlil Parker KC, Ms Khrystle Rutherford Ferguson, Mr Herbert Cash and Registrar Kristina Wallace Whitfield.

The Rules Committee: Justice Indra Charles, Mr. Kahlil Parker KC, Miss Tleca Rolle and Mr Terry North.

I managing all of these Bodies, I would be crippled without the able assistance of Executive Director Miss Nicoya Neely.

I wish to thank the President of the Bar, Mr. Khalil Parker KC and his hard-working Bar Council for continuing to partner with us during 2025. I look forward to continuing our partnership in 2026.

I also wish to express my thanks and gratitude to the Hon. Attorney General, the leader of the Bar, and his team at OAG. The Hon. Attorney General has always been extremely supportive of all our initiatives and projects. As he has signally that this is his final Opening of the Legal Year presentation as Attorney General, I wish to publicly record in the records of this Court, my thanks and appreciation on behalf of the judiciary for his service as Attorney General. As the liaison between the Courts.

I remain privileged to have been afforded the opportunity to lead the talented judicial officers and staff that make up the judiciary across The Bahamas. I again publically express my thanks for all that you do to ensure that we live up to the constitutional mandate of an independent, impartial and fearless judiciary.

With these words then, I declare the 2026 Legal Year, officially open.