

5th December 2025

PRESS RELEASE

The 2nd anniversary of the Criminal Justice Board (Needham's Point Declaration)

Belize City, Belize - Chief Justice, Hon. Mde. Louise Esther Blenman, of the Senior Courts of Belize, is pleased to recognise the 2nd anniversary of the Criminal Justice Board (Needham's Point Declaration). Established on 5th December 2023 as a permanent committee within the Office of the Chief Justice, the Board was created to confront the issues of entrenched and systemic deficiencies at every level of the criminal justice system through the operationalisation of the Needham's Point Declaration in alignment with the Senior Courts' Strategic Plan and the UNDP Needs Assessment Report.

Over the past 2 years, Belize has witnessed a paradigm shift in its approach to criminal justice, and the Chief Justice extends commendation to the multi-disciplinary Board for its steadfast dedication to advancing criminal justice reform through a people-centred approach. The Board has fostered a culture of collegiality and shared responsibility among criminal justice stakeholders and has demonstrated that coordinated institutional action can deliver meaningful and measurable improvement in criminal justice delivery.

Notably, the Board recommended a suite of targeted legislative and policy interventions which have resulted in remarkable case output, with judges' annual clearance and disposition rates nearly tripling. Early resolution of cases has increased significantly through the use of plea discussions, maximum sentence indications, and newly passed Sentencing Guidelines. For 2025, by October, 40% of completed cases in the High Court concluded with guilty pleas.

The Board's work has resulted in substantial reductions in the remand population from approximately 80% to 20%. Only a few years ago, indictments pending in the High Court were often 10 or more years old. Today, the average indictment is no more than 2 years old. Outstanding criminal appeals are largely confined to recent years, previously, there were criminal appeals as old as 7 years. This progress is highly remarkable and illustrative of the Board's impact and the excellent collaboration between judges, magistrates, police prosecutors, the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the criminal defence bar and other criminal justice stakeholders.

In partnership with the Community Rehabilitation Department (CRD), the Board launched "Law and Youth," where Board members and CRD officers lead interactive sessions helping secondary students understand their legal rights and responsibilities. Plans are underway to expand this into monthly nationwide school visits to promote civic awareness and strengthen trust in the justice system.

As the Board enters its third year, the Hon. Chief Justice encourages all criminal justice stakeholders to maintain this momentum. The Board continues to serve as a vital conduit for advancing criminal justice reform that is efficient, inclusive, and aligned with Belize's national and sustainable development goals.

END