

JOINT STATEMENT BY THE HEADS OF JUDICIARY

The Caribbean Heads of Judiciary note with deep and unsettling concern the recent attack on the judiciary through remarks made to the media by the Hon. Gaston Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda on 10th August 2026.

Apparently dissatisfied with what he regards as lenient sentences being ordered in criminal matters before the court, the Prime Minister referenced, without naming, a “particular judge” whom he considers “has a propensity to give criminals a break”. The Hon. Prime Minister ventured further in his statement to suggest that if the judge is unable to “follow the lead of the parliament to give longer sentences” he should leave the country voluntarily or otherwise be deported and made persona non grata.

We strongly condemn these unfortunate remarks made by the Hon. Gaston Browne against the judge and by extension, the judiciary of the Eastern Caribbean region. Not only are such statements regrettable but they are a threat to the very independence of the judiciary. They have the potential to erode and weaken the efficacy of the doctrine of separation of powers, which is the very bedrock upon which democratic governance rests. Mutual respect for the constitutional boundaries between the three co-equal arms of the state - the Judiciary, the Executive and the Legislature - is an indispensable necessity for the effective and just preservation of the rule of law and the integrity of our democratic institutions. For this reason, the Heads of Judiciary denounce the Prime Minister’s remarks as unproductive and dangerous, bearing only the potential to undermine public confidence in the administration of justice.

Should the Honourable Prime Minister form the view that the sentences are unduly lenient, there is a well-established mechanism to address this issue. That is by providing a right of appeal to the prosecution to the Court of Appeal and to the apex court which is either the Caribbean Court of Justice or the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. This is the only lawful and legitimate manner consistent with the rule of law and the separation of powers for the issue to be resolved.

We acknowledge robust public discussions and legitimate criticisms as healthy and important features of a democratic society. However, these criticisms must be grounded in respect and directed toward constructive and collaborative engagement. Despite these unfortunate events, the judiciary will continue to hold firm to its constitutional mandate to discharge its functions impartially, independently and without fear or favour.