

Justice Hugh Small, Q.C., yesterday urged the business community to take a more proactive role in advocating for and supporting the reform of the justice system.

The former Minister of Finance was speaking at yesterday's first Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica (PSOJ) members luncheon at the Hilton hotel, New Kingston. Justice Small represented the PSOJ on the Jamaica Justice System Reform Task Force (JJSRTF), a 27-member team of experts, who have committed themselves to improving the local justice system. He spoke to the findings of the JJSRTF report, which identified a few strengths in the justice system but elaborated on the weaknesses, 12 of which were highlighted. Delays in the disposal of criminal and civil matters; underfunding and outdated and inefficient practices and procedures were listed among the weaknesses.

Very important elements

"It is therefore fitting that in examining the relationship between economic growth and our justice system we should pay some attention to the direction in which the report guides us. Simply put, it suggests that commercial justice and commercial laws are considered very important elements in business competitiveness," Justice Small said. He noted that investors compare commercial justice and commercial laws before making decisions regarding investment risks. He cited the stark difference in litigation time frames between the local Court of Appeal and the Privy Council in London.

He pointed to the fact that Haiti's Chamber of Commerce recently obtained a non-refundable grant from the Inter-American Development Bank to assist in developing a better commercial resolution system in that country, and questioned, "why not us?"