

WOODBROOK

Ramdeen: Judiciary 'playing politics'

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OPPOSITION Senator Gerald Ramdeen has accused the Judiciary of "playing politics" and he plans to challenge the decision to restart 53 part-heard matters that were before former chief magistrate Marcia Ayers-Caesar before her appointment and subsequent resignation from the High Court.

The decision to restart the matters was taken following a meeting convened by Chief Justice Ivor Archie and comprised Director of Public Prosecutions Roger Gaspard, the Law Association, Criminal Bar Association, the acting Chief Magistrate, senior magistrates and the Registrar of the Supreme Court.

During a news conference at his Woodbrook office yesterday, Ramdeen described the meeting as unlawful and unconstitutional and said it was astounding that the Chief Justice and those present at the meeting gave themselves the power to determine what should happen with the 53 cases.

He said this decision could only be made by the court hearing the matter, in this case the Eighth Magistrates' Court.

"The Chief Justice has come up with this idea that he can convene a meeting of persons, who he chooses to invite, and that body will determine how these matters are going to be dealt with. This has never been done before. Where does the Chief Justice get the power to do this?"

Further, he said three High Court judges and three Court of Appeal judges were present at the meeting and will now have to be disqualified from hearing any of the 53 matters if any come before them.

No say for incarcerated

Ramdeen said even more worrying was that none of the incarcerated persons whose cases are being affected were allowed to have a say. "It didn't occur to anybody that the people who

are most affected should have some say in what is going on?" he asked. "It didn't occur to them at any point in time that the 53 people had a right to be heard?"

Ramdeen is representing one of the affected people—Akili Charles—who has been incarcerated at the Frederick Street prison for the past five-and-a-half years.

"At no time was my client or his legal advisers invited to this meeting to make representations of given notice of this meeting and the agenda," Ramdeen wrote in a letter to the Chief Justice. "Any decision made by this body that is intended to determine how the future conduct of my clients proceedings are to be conducted are null and void and of no effect."

He said Ayers-Caesar must also be allowed to have her say and give her side of the story.

Ramdeen also accused the Chief Justice of misleading the Law Association on the true purpose of the meeting. He said the invitation to the Law Association to nominate people to attend the meeting was to discuss "administration of justice in the magistracy".

It was not stated that the meeting would be convened to reach a determination on the 53 matters, he said.

Withdraw or else

Ramdeen said if the decision to restart the matters is not withdrawn by 4 p.m. tomorrow, he will be taking the matter before the courts.

"The Judiciary is playing politics with the administration of justice," he said. "The Judiciary and the administration of justice is under a greater threat than ever before and we are clearly in very dangerous and very perilous times and those who are to steer us out of it are disappointing us with every step they take." He said the Judicial and Legal Service Commission (JLSC) must man up and take responsibility for the fiasco. On Thursday the Law Association will be holding a special general meeting to determine a motion of no confidence in the Chief Justice.