

JUDICIAL SERVICE COMMISSION

“A Zimbabwe in which world class justice prevails!”



ADDRESS BY

**THE HONOURABLE MRS JUSTICE E. GWAUNZA,
DEPUTY CHIEF JUSTICE OF ZIMBABWE**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING
OF THE 2023 LEGAL YEAR**

ON

9 JANUARY 2023

BULAWAYO

**THEME: PROMOTING COMPETENCE AND
QUALITY OF SERVICE TO ENHANCE PUBLIC
CONFIDENCE IN THE JUDICIARY**

SALUTATIONS,

- 1. Senior Judge Honourable Justice Makonese and Honourable Judges of The High Court**
- 2. Labour Court Judge Hon Justice Kachambwa**
- 3. Minister of State for Bulawayo Metropolitan Province
Represented by Director of Economic Affairs and Investments
Mr Saunyama**
- 4. City of Bulawayo Town Clerk Mr Christopher Dube**
- 5. Judicial Service Commissioner Mr Tandaza Masiyemoyo**
- 6. JSC Head of Procurement, Mr Elias Muzenda**
- 7. Senior Regional Magistrate, Western Division Mr Collet
Ncube and Other Magistrates Here Present**
- 8. The Chief Law Officer Mrs Takuva and Other Law Officers in
The National Prosecuting Authority Office**
- 9. Senior Advocate Mr Nkomo and Other Legal Practitioners Here
Present**

- 10. Service Chiefs**
- 11. Bishop C Lunga**
- 12. Assessors of the High Court**
- 13. Deputy Registrars and Judicial Service Commission Staff**
- 14. Judicial Service Commission Stakeholders**
- 15. Press**
- 16. Distinguished Guests**
- 17. Ladies And Gentlemen,**

we interact at the beginning of yet another new year. This is an opportunity, once again, to reflect on the operations of the courts and account to the people of Zimbabwe by giving a report on the work carried out by the Judiciary in 2022, as well as pronouncing on targets and objectives for 2023. The Legal Year Opening Speech provides the Judiciary with one of the occasions of accounting to the people for the exercise of the authority they vested in it as a constitutional body for their benefit. The Judiciary uses the occasion to comment on issues of concern to its public image as a constitutional institution which by their nature may not be addressed by courts in judgments.

The past year goes down in the country's judicial history as the year in which the journey to digitise operations of the courts commenced with the adoption of the Integrated Electronic Case Management System – “the IECMS”. It is also the year in which the Judiciary saw the establishment and opening of the first paperless court in Zimbabwe in the form of the stand-alone Commercial Division of the High Court. In line with the governmental policy of devolution as a constitutional imperative, the

Judicial Service Commission opened more circuit courts. It further consolidated the operations of the **Judicial Training Institute of Zimbabwe** by adopting measures that enable it to efficiently implement the programmes of organising and managing the training of judicial and non-judicial members of the Judicial Service.

The Judiciary's efforts to attend to the quantitative aspect of court operations should not be taken to mean that it is overlooking the importance of quality of the service provided to the public. Competence and quality of service provision are equally important constitutional requirements. Failure to meet the standards of the requirements of competence and quality of justice delivery service would undermine efforts to build and maintain public confidence in the Judiciary. Hence, the theme for this year is:

“PROMOTING COMPETENCE AND QUALITY OF SERVICE PROVISION IN THE JUDICIARY TO ENHANCE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE”.

The theme is informed by the realisation that the Judiciary has both a legal and a moral obligation to provide quality service to the recipients of that service. The theme speaks to the understanding that provision of service has two fundamental aspects, connected to each other by the activity of performance of a duty.

On the one hand is the servant or duty bearer who has to perform legally prescribed duties according to prescribed objective standards set, not for his or her benefit, but for the benefit of the persons entitled to receive the service. Not only should the duty bearer act in the performance of the duties of the public office he or she occupies according to the requirements of the procedures and acts prescribed by the applicable law, he or she must do so in a manner that instils a sense of justice and fairness in the hearts of fair-minded and reasonable members of the public.

The theme therefore speaks not only to conformity with the legal requirements of the performance of duties in the provision of service to the court users in a manner that meets legitimate expectations; it also speaks to the need for constant management and monitoring of service

provision to ensure that outcomes meet the standards of quality promotive of public confidence in the Judiciary.

The theme is also informed by the obligation imposed on the courts by the law that judicial officers must be competent. It is only then that the public will have confidence in the courts and will respect the decisions coming out of the courts.

Public confidence implies widespread trust and confidence by the people in the ability of the Judiciary to adjudicate disputes fairly and impartially, without fear, favour or ill will. Generally, public confidence is a product of both how the courts dispense justice and the quality of service obtained by the people from the courts.

Section 164(1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe states that courts are independent and are subject only to the Constitution and the law, which they must apply impartially, expeditiously, and without fear, favour, or prejudice. **Section 164(2)** specifically requires that "Members of the judiciary, individually and collectively, respect and honour their judicial office as a public trust and **strive to enhance their independence in**

order to maintain public confidence in the judicial system". The Judicial Service Commission is required by **section 190 of the Constitution** to conduct its business in a just, fair and transparent manner. The need to ensure public confidence and trust in the judicial system is undoubtedly one of the reasons why the Judicial Service Commission must act in a just, fair, and transparent manner. Judicial independence protects the important presumption that the Judiciary does not act on instructions of other arms of the State. This, in turn, gives effect to the impartiality of judicial officers, as they represent an objective standard upon which legal disputes can be adequately addressed.

Public confidence in the judicial system is essential for maintaining peace, order and the rule of law. When the courts make decisions, and are seen and allowed to perform their duties with the independence, impartiality and expedition required by the law for the resolution of disputes, public confidence in the judicial service is enhanced.

The duty on a person providing judicial service is to provide the service to every person seeking it in accordance with the law with the necessary

speed and within a reasonable time with due respect to the dignity of the person concerned. **It is not part of the duties of officers in the Judiciary to satisfy personal needs of court users. Where one is aggrieved by a decision made by the court it is important to rely on the available legal processes for remedy. It is the parties who bring their disputes to the courts. The courts apply the law and ultimately reach a decision in favour of the one who has proved their case according to the law. Publicly insulting the courts and judicial officers because one has lost their case will not help to have the court order set aside.** Such conduct has the effect of undermining public confidence in the Judiciary. The Judiciary is bound by the law to resist the often insidious pressure to make decisions according to public clamour, contrary to the dictates of the facts and the applicable law.

Similarly, when the National Prosecuting Authority exercises its mandate to decide whether to prosecute a matter or to decline to prosecute a matter, this is a mandate provided for in the Constitution and it is improper for

other institutions, including the Judiciary, the Police and the Zimbabwe Anti Corruption Commission, to attempt to interfere with the organ.

The Judiciary is the last line of defence when it comes to the protection of fundamental human rights. Where the Judiciary makes a decision on a matter, whether it is the granting of bail or refusal to do so, or whether it is the conviction of a suspect or his or her acquittal in criminal proceedings, it would be highly improper for other institutions to purport to interfere with the process or make extra-judicial comments imputing corruption in the Judiciary. Whilst cooperation between State entities is encouraged to enhance efficiency in the criminal justice system, the independence of the Judiciary must be respected, consistent with the dictates of the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers.

Failure to deal with allegations of corruption in the courts may result in the loss of public confidence in the criminal justice system. It is equally important that the public is given accurate information on the matter. Currently there are **147** corruption related cases pending in the courts. Of these cases, **89** cases are either in progress or have been finalised, with **16**

cases having trial dates, whilst for **52** cases trials have commenced. **21** cases have already been finalised.

The statistics given above do not indicate a country that is not taking the fight against corruption seriously. They show that arresting agents and prosecution agencies are busy at work. They also show that the courts are dealing with these cases actively when they are brought before them. These remarks are made because the impression sought to be created is that there is no activity in courts in respect of corruption cases. The cynical suggestion has been that courts are involved in a conspiracy arrangement with the other State agents in the criminal justice system to release persons accused of corruption in what is called a “catch and release” phenomenon. When a person has been arrested, he or she is entitled to bail as of right unless there are compelling reasons not to grant bail. When a person accused of a crime is released on bail, this is a legal and constitutionally provided for process, not to be derogatively dismissed as a “*catch and release*” procedure. When a trial takes place, it is also a constitutional imperative that the suspect goes through a fair trial. Whether the person is

convicted or acquitted, that is justice at work. A person who has gone through the criminal proceedings and is released on acquittal cannot be dismissed as a “*catch and release*” case. The Constitution guarantees a fair criminal justice system. It does not guarantee a criminal justice system in which everyone arrested must be convicted even where there is no evidence. There cannot be public confidence in such a system. The so-called “*catch and release*” narrative ascribed to the courts has no legal and factual basis.

Admittedly, institutions in the criminal justice system need to ensure that cases of corruption are properly investigated, prosecuted and adjudicated upon and speedily finalised in the courts. The constitutional obligation is that all stakeholders in the justice delivery system must ensure that disputes brought for hearing and determination by the courts are resolved expeditiously. Tardiness and delays in the handling of cases are incidents that are contrary to the efficiency and effectiveness demanded of a justice delivery system.

Public confidence in the justice system is a goal of justice delivery. Members of the Judicial Service must always understand that the quality of the service rendered to court users is measured in terms of the outcomes of the conduct of the service provider. There should be some consciousness on the part of members of the Judicial Service on what the public demands of them in the delivery of justice and the need to perform to those expectations. The public will, for example, have trust in the judicial processes where the registry and clerical staff attend to litigants with respect and promptly; where matters filed in the courts are processed with speed and the requisite skill; and where the staff shun corruption. The public will have confidence in the justice delivery system where the halls of justice are clean and well equipped with modern equipment, where the resources are made readily available for the courts to perform their functions effectively, and where complaints made are thoroughly investigated and resolved without unreasonable delays.

Competence is the ability to do something well, to the expected standards with the requisite skill and knowledge. Every standard relating to the

Judiciary can and ought to be traced back to the Constitution, and the question of competence in the provision of judicial service is no exception. An explicit reference to this subject matter in relation to the performance of Judges is found in **section 187(b) of the Constitution**, which prescribes gross incompetence as one of the three grounds for removing Judges from office. This evidently highlights the gravity of the issue of competence in relation to the duty of a Judge.

The legal underpinning for judicial competence is also provided for in **section 164 of the Constitution**, which emphasises judicial independence and the effectiveness of the courts. **Section 164(2)** expressly provides that the independence, impartiality and **effectiveness of the courts** are central to the rule of law and democratic governance. The link between judicial competence and the effectiveness of the courts is established. Courts cannot be effective without competent and quality judicial officers manning them. Effective courts are those that are manned by competent judicial officers, in the sense of their being capable and able to act independently and impartially in the expeditious resolution of

disputes before the courts. Competence as an essential feature of a performance of the judicial function underpins the quality of the service delivered. It also controls the perception the public has of the courts. Such a conclusion is supported by the very definition of justice, which relates to “the amount of fairness that people experience and perceive when they take steps to solve disputes and grievances”.

An incompetent Judiciary cannot enforce the rule of law, which is the hallmark of justice. The rule of law speaks to the equality of rights for everyone before the law. A common standard can only be achieved when the institution charged with the dispensation of justice is competent. This, in turn, affects the Judiciary's democratic governance purpose, as its internal processes and norms and its interaction with other institutions are compromised.

It is important to note that the need for competence also extends to the supporting staff who assist Judges and magistrates in the execution of their duties. Judicial officers do not dispense their duties in a vacuum. They rely on the competence of the internal functionaries of the respective

courts. Competence expected of the Judiciary therefore does not end with the Judges and magistrates but extends to members of the support staff, such as registrars, researchers, clerks, interpreters, court recorders, ICT officers, e-filing officers, and members of the Office of the Sheriff. Competence as an essential feature of quality performance of the duties of office extends to members of the Judicial Service Commission Secretariat, such as accountants, training officers, administrators and procurement officers. Incompetent performance of duties by the non-judicial officers would result in failure to provide proper administrative support to the courts.

The Constitution recognises that competence does not only require one to satisfy the requisite educational and professional qualifications at the point of entry into a judicial office. After appointment, the need for continuous skills development is a constitutional requirement.

Based on the acceptance of the fact that competence is the state of having sufficient knowledge, judgment, and skill for a particular duty, **section 165(7) of the Constitution** underscores the fact that the

responsibility of ensuring as a member of the Judiciary that one has the requisite competence for properly performing one's duties also falls on the members of the Judiciary individually and collectively. In other words, the responsibility of ensuring that members of the Judiciary have the requisite competence for the proper performance of their duties does not fall on the institution alone. **Section 165(7) of the Constitution** provides:

"(7) Members of the judiciary must take reasonable steps to maintain and enhance their professional knowledge, skills and personal qualities, and in particular must keep themselves abreast of developments in domestic and international law."

Quality of service is simply a measure of how the services provided by the Judiciary compare against the standard that is set by the law for justice delivery and the public's legitimate expectations. Where the Judiciary provides standards that fall far below the legal standard and the public's expectations, there will be a grave miscarriage of justice.

The nature of the quality of service demanded of the Judiciary is discernable from various tools put in place to guide its operations. The Judicial Service Commission's Strategic Plan has clear aims and objectives relating to strategic focus areas meant to guide members of the Judicial Service in the provision of services to the public. The Judiciary is also guided by standard operating procedures put in place to guide its members on the uniform standards expected of them when they interact with and assist the public. The rules of the various courts guide judicial officers in dealing with court processes.

Any service that the Judiciary provides must meet the standard outlined in the Constitution. In this regard, Zimbabwe's founding values and principles, which appear in **section 3**, stand as the basic standard undergirding the quality of service obtained from the courts. It provides for, amongst others, the rule of law, transparency, accountability and good governance. These are the most important fundamental values that ensure quality in the services provided to the public.

Section 194 of the Constitution provides for the principles that define the parameters of the dynamics of the relationship between the exercise of power by any public institution in the administration of public affairs and public interest. Every public institution is to exercise public power in a manner that promotes -

- a high standard of professional ethics,
- efficient and economical use of resources,
- development-oriented public administration,
- the impartial, fair, equitable and unbiased provision of services,
- response to people's needs within a reasonable time,
- accountability to the people, and
- cooperation between institutions and agencies of government at all levels.

These values and principles have a bearing on the quality of service provided by the courts. If any of the Judiciary's services fall below the standards established by the principles prescribed by the Constitution, the

public may lose confidence in the justice delivery system. The Judiciary has taken steps to improve the quality of court processes and decisions, through training of judicial officers. Judicial Symposia are held, where Judges discuss various issues to enhance and improve their judicial knowledge and skills. The Judges participated in international conferences and workshops where they have shared experiences with counterparts within and outside the region. Training has been extended to the magistrates through the **Judicial Training Institute of Zimbabwe**. They were exposed to discussions of subject matters in areas of their work, such as human rights, sentencing, criminal and civil procedure, and judgment writing. All this was done in order to comply with the constitutional imperative of providing quality service to the people.

The performance of judicial officers is generally good. The common source of criticism received emanated from litigants who would have had court decisions made against them. The tendency is to blame lack of judicial competence for the loss. At worst, they allege corruption. Whilst the tendency to blame a judicial officer for a negative decision is

understandable in the cases of self-actors who may not be aware of the available legal remedies for redressing the perceived wrong, it becomes a cause of concern when a legal practitioner, who is an officer of court, is involved. It is regrettable conduct for a legal practitioner to go on social media or to assemble a press conference to castigate a court decision and insult the judicial officer because he or she made a decision against the legal practitioner's client. Whilst constructive and measured criticism of court decisions are welcome and encouraged as they add value to jurisprudential development, no value is added to the justice delivery system from scandalous attacks on the integrity of judicial officers.

The focus on quality service by the Judiciary is not only directed at judicial officers but also at non-judicial members of staff. There should be a correlation of good conduct and efficient performance by both judicial and non-judicial members of staff in order for the Judiciary to fulfil its mandate as encapsulated in the Constitution.

It is in this respect that the Judicial Service Commission introduced the Integrated Electronic Case Management System ("the IECMS") in the

courts, on the basis of the belief that the digitisation of the courts would ensure the provision of quality service to the public.

The refurbishment and rehabilitation of courts being done by the Judicial Service Commission is another area that speaks to the need to provide smart, clean and well equipped halls of justice that create a conducive environment for litigation. Most of the courts are now equipped with new and modern furniture.

Prompt response to inquiries by court users and efficient processing of files in the courts by the registrars and the clerks is another area being improved to enhance the quality of service provided. The time taken between the filing of a matter and setting it down for hearing has been remarkably reduced in the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court. Previously, a matter filed in either of these courts would take up to three years or more to be heard. The time has now been reduced to between **six and nine** months for the matter to be set down, heard and finalised. This is because of the efficiency now found in the registries of the two courts.

The target is to have a matter set down, heard and finalised within **three to six** months of filing.

The Judicial Service Commission received hundreds of complaints from members of the public, legal practitioners and other Government agencies during the course of the year. During the year under review, **322** complaints made by persons who in one way or another had contact with the courts were received. The policy is that each complaint must be properly investigated and the complainant given feedback without delay.

Whilst some of the complaints related to grievances against decisions made by the courts which can only be dealt with in terms of court processes, those that had merit were attended to and remedial action taken.

This again is done in the spirit of improving quality service to the public.

The Judiciary, through the Judicial Service Commission, has undertaken and will be pursuing several initiatives that are aimed at ensuring competence and improving the quality of service provided. These include the training of judicial officers and support staff, the digitisation of the

courts, and the procurement of resources necessary for the proper administration of justice.

Serious concern has arisen relating to the slow movement and finalisation of criminal matters especially murder cases. Statistics show that there is in excess of **one thousand murder cases** pending indictment to the High Court for trial. The attendant difficulties and anxiety experienced by the accused persons waiting for trial, the witnesses including complainants who would want closure to cases, and members of the public with interest in the outcome of the trials cannot be ignored. Any lethargic approach in the disposition of criminal matters by stakeholders in the justice sector regrettably points to the incompetence of the system and erodes public confidence in the justice system. It is important that all stakeholders in the criminal justice system, especially the Judiciary, the National Prosecuting Authority, the Zimbabwe Republic Police and the Law Society of Zimbabwe, perform their respective functions efficiently so that the unacceptable situation is eliminated.

In order to address the anomaly, it became necessary to set up a committee of persons constituted by representatives of stakeholder institutions in the criminal justice sector, known as the **National Council on the Administration of Criminal Justice**. The rationale for the setting up of the **National Council on the Administration of Criminal Justice** is the fact that the finalisation of criminal cases is dependent on inter-institutional cooperation. Needless to say, one other reason for the development is the enhancement of public confidence in the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system represents the most basic form of the law and one of the essential means within the judicial system for the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms. Under the Constitution, the criminal justice system is designed to guarantee the respect and protection of the rights of persons brought before the criminal courts.

The main objective of the **National Council on the Administration of Criminal Justice** is to ensure a coordinated, efficient, effective, and consultative approach in the administration and reform of the criminal

justice delivery system in Zimbabwe. It comprises the Judge President of the High Court, the Acting Prosecutor-General, the Commissioner General of Police, the Commissioner General of the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services, the Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission, the Senior Judge of the High Court in Bulawayo, the Head of the Criminal Division of the Harare High Court, the Secretary of the Judicial Service Commission, the Chief Magistrate, and the Secretary of the Law Society of Zimbabwe. The expectation is that the **National Council on the Administration of Criminal Justice** will provide effective solutions to ensure that the backlog of criminal cases is wiped out and the recurrence of the prevailing situation prevented.

Whilst still on the area of the criminal justice system, allow me to comment on an important aspect, that of sentencing. After one is convicted of a criminal offence the next stage that the court will be seized with is consideration of the appropriate sentence to be imposed. The presiding judicial officer is charged with the mandate to assess the appropriate sentence, taking into account the gravity of the offence and

the circumstances of the offender as well as the interests of society. Whilst this is a discretionary process on the part of the judicial officer, the courts get criticised on the disparity in sentencing, where the same criminal conduct is punished differently depending on the personal views of the presiding officer. The public will obviously lose confidence in a system where there is no consistency and uniformity in sentencing. This gave rise to the need for the consideration and adoption of uniform sentencing guidelines in the absence of a codified sentencing regime.

The Legislature, cognisant of the existing inconsistencies in the sentencing of criminal offenders and because Zimbabwe does not have a codified sentencing system, enacted **section 334A of the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act [Chapter 9:07]**. This provision mandates the Judicial Service Commission to convene a sentencing conference, bringing together the Judiciary and other important stakeholders in the justice, law and order sector, as well as other bodies and institutions that have interest and expertise in crime, punishment, and rehabilitation or treatment of

criminals. The sentencing conference, bringing together representatives of these bodies, was to meet and discuss objectives, policies, standards and criteria various for sentencing offenders and to formulate draft sentencing guidelines for submission to the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs for publication as regulations in terms of **section 389**.

A **Sentencing Conference Council** was set up to organise and manage the affairs of the Sentencing Conference. The Sentencing Conference was convened and held from 5-7 December 2022. The discussions covered thematic areas aimed at –

- Promoting criminal justice by properly interrogating the sentencing objectives of rehabilitation, punishment, restoration and prevention, and setting appropriate guidelines for their application;
- Promoting consistency and transparency in sentencing through the development and revision of sentencing guidelines;
- Cultivating and entrenching public confidence in the sentencing process by improving public knowledge and understanding of

sentencing processes and procedures, including among stakeholders, survivors, victims, witnesses, offenders as well as the general public.

The Sentencing Conference was attended by various players in Government and civic society. Draft sentencing guidelines were drawn up for presentation to the Judicial Service Commission, which will study them for submission to the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs.

The process will obviously bring about uniformity and consistency in the sentences imposed by the courts. Public confidence in the criminal justice system will be enhanced.

THE JUDICIAL SERVICE COMMISSION'S ACTIVITIES DURING THE YEAR 2022

LAUNCH AND OPERATIONALISATION OF THE INTEGRATED ELECTRONIC CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The most important and far-reaching project undertaken during the course of the year was the launch of the IECMS in the courts, commonly known as “the digitisation of the courts”. The journey travelled up to implementation was as exhilarating as it was exhausting. In 2018 the nation was informed during the state of the Judiciary address that the Judicial Service Commission intended to digitise and integrate all the courts electronically to enhance transparency and to improve the efficiency and accountability of the processes and proceedings. In 2019 the nation was advised that the Judicial Service Commission Secretariat had initiated research on the most suitable and relevant electronic system to be adopted by the courts. In 2020 it was indicated that the IECMS had been adopted. The nation was informed that the process of identifying the most suitable service provider through a comprehensive procurement process, assisted by the Procurement Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe and the Ministry of Finance, had begun. In 2021, having settled on Synergy International as the successful contractor, contract negotiations with Synergy International were finalised with the assistance of the office of the Attorney-General, the Office of the President and Cabinet and the

Ministry of Finance. The designing of the system commenced and the recruitment of ICT personnel and their training started.

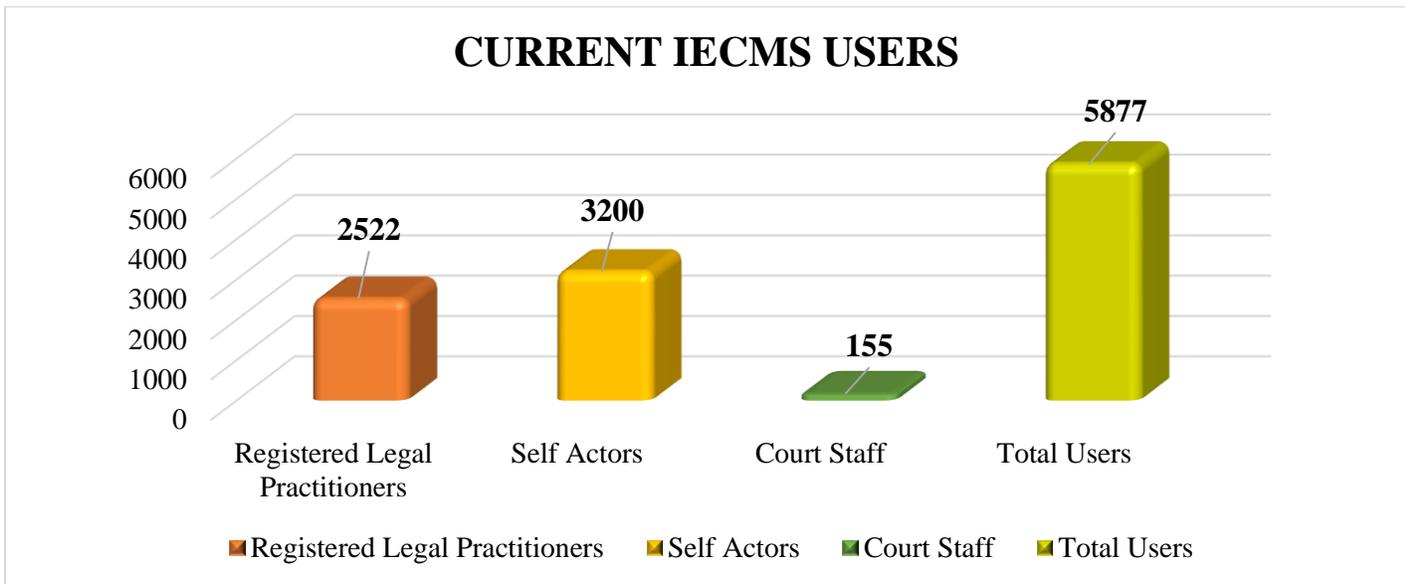
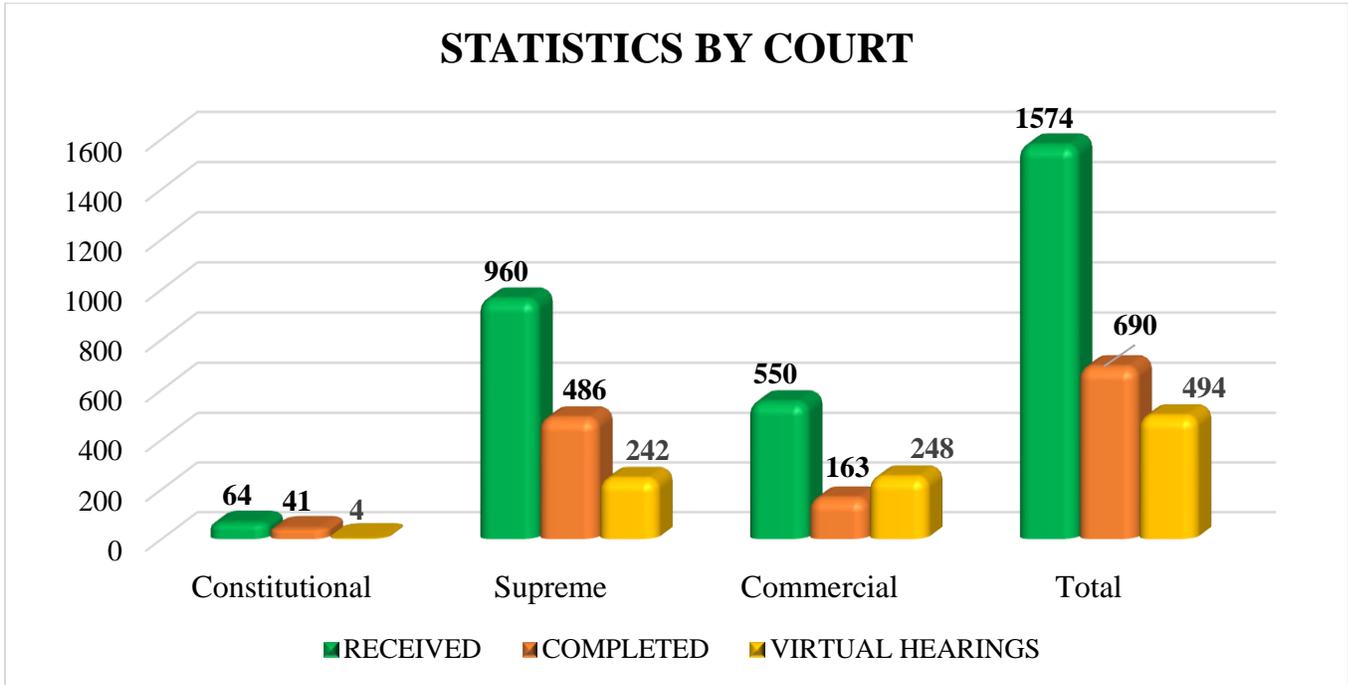
On 01 May 2022, after years of meticulous planning and laying the groundwork, the Judicial Service Commission successfully launched the IECMS. The digital platform is a web-based case management system that automates and tracks matters from their inception up until they are disposed of by the presiding judicial officers or attending court staff. To prevent a radical overhaul in the effective operation of the courts, the digitisation drive took a measured approach in which the operationalisation was done in phases, with the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court and the Commercial Court Division of the High Court, known as the Commercial Court, being the first to benefit from the launch of the IECMS.

As a result, processes in the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court transitioned from the traditional full-paper system to an online system consistent with developments in other jurisdictions. Pending matters within the registries were uploaded onto the platform's servers to ensure

that Judges took part in the transitional process, with access to records and case files being provided digitally. The Commercial Court did not require any transition as its operations and processes were digitalised from inception. Instead, it was the duty of the Judges selected to operate the newly established court electronically. The duties of the support staff were transformed as they adapted their functions to the demands of the IECMS platform. All the three courts have been conducting virtual hearings through the system without the need for parties or their legal practitioners to be physically present in the courts. The migration from the conventional means of judicial operation has been a resounding success in the courts under Phase One. The response by all stakeholders has been positive and it can safely be said that the future looks bright.

As at **31 December 2022**, a total of **1 574** cases had been registered in the system for the three courts, of which **494** virtual court sessions successfully took place. Currently there are **5 877** IECMS registered users, of whom **758** are law firms, **2 522** are legal practitioners and the

rest are members of the public. The consolidated statistics are stated hereunder -



*The 2 522 Legal Practitioners fall under 758 law firms

Since 2018 the nation has been advised of the advantages of digitising the courts. Besides keeping abreast with developments in the region and the world over, the integrated electronic management of court processes enhances transparency, accountability, efficiency, accessibility of justice, and fights corruption, amongst other advantages. Limitations to access to justice, such as distance, transport costs and delays, have been eliminated, with legal practitioners and litigants being able to attend court sessions through the IECMS platform promptly. The knock-on effect experienced has been the reduction in litigation costs, which is in the contemplation of the Judicial Service Commission as it strives to ensure that access to justice does not become the preserve of the wealthy to the exclusion of poor, vulnerable and marginalised members of society.

To this end, e-filing offices have been established, manned by e-filing officers, at every court station in the country. Where one does not have the required gadget, internet access or any other equipment required for purposes of filing a process or participating in a virtual hearing, one only needs to visit the nearest court to one's home or office where all the

equipment including internet will be available for one's use for free and trained e-filing officers will assist with the filing of one's matter. A **24 Hour Call Centre**, manned by trained **Call-Centre officers** who attend to inquiries instantly, has been established. An on-line **Help-Desk** has also been introduced within the system where one can chat or send emails with any questions or inquiries on any issue relating to the use and application of the system. Help is again readily available. Between 01 May and 31 December 2022 **559** calls were received by the **Call-Centre** and **1 166** inquiries went through the **Help-Desk** platform. Members of the public, litigants and legal practitioners are urged to make use of these platforms, which are intended to assist in navigating through the system. The **Call-Centre** number is **08688007422** and the **Help-Desk** email is zimiecms@jsc.org.zw.

The IECMS has ensured that the duties of the various actors in the judicial system, such as registrars and their subordinates, are tracked with timestamps detailing the exact dates and times of action. Litigants can now view the status and progress of their cases without relying solely on

the word of their legal practitioner or the sometimes curt responses of court staff. Conversely the ability of court staff to go on frolics of their own while neglecting their duties has been restricted by the accountability features of the digital platform.

The Judicial Service Commission Secretariat now employs a total of **215** personnel in the ICT department, run by the Head of ICT assisted by two deputies, with one of the deputies specifically in charge of the digitisation of the courts. The remaining personnel are software developers, front and backend business intelligence officers, cyber security officers, data center engineers, data engineers, systems analysts, hardware and network engineers, virtual court officers, statisticians, court recorders, ICT officers, help-desk administrators, call-center officers, e-filing officers, librarians and transcribers.

The digitisation of the courts is here to stay. The target is to have all the courts digitised. The Government, through Treasury, has expended a great deal of money to have the IECMS put in place in the courts. It is imperative that all stakeholders co-operate and constructively contribute

to the success of the implementation of the system. The Judiciary will now move to **Phase Two** of the implementation of the IECMS, with the **Labour Court and the Administrative Court going digital on 01 February 2023.**

The successful implementation of the digitisation of the courts in Zimbabwe has been a success story in the region. Counterparts from the region have been coming to get information on how the implementation of the IECMS was carried out. The motto adopted on the digitisation of the courts in Zimbabwe is “*backwards never and forward ever*”.

COMMISSIONING OF THE COMMERCIAL DIVISION OF THE HIGH COURT

May 2022 was a momentous month for the Judiciary, as the launch of the IECMS coincided with the opening of the Commercial Division of the High Court (commonly known as the “Commercial Court”) as a stand-alone establishment. The two historic events will be remembered as symbols of the introduction of the technological innovation in the case management system of the courts. The Commercial Court was not only

the first stand-alone Division of the High Court operating from a separate building; it was the first to operate a paperless electronic system of case management. The Commercial Court was commissioned on 06 May 2022 by His Excellency the President, Dr Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa. It is replete with modern infrastructure and equipment that meets the standards of quality service. The establishment of separate premises has resulted in a case flow reduction in the High Court, as commercial litigation is now exclusively instituted in the Commercial Court. The public is already benefitting from the establishment of the stand-alone Commercial Court, as the hearing of commercial matters is now expedited.

As indicated by His Excellency the President at the official opening ceremony, the Judiciary has played its part in enhancing the ease of doing business through the establishment of the Commercial Court. The continued efforts of the Judges and the support staff at Bristol House will contribute towards creating an environment conducive for foreign direct investment.

COMMISSIONING OF THE LUPANE MAGISTRATES' COURT

In furtherance of the implementation matrix of the Judicial Service Commission's 2021–2025 Strategic Plan, the past year also witnessed the commissioning of the new Lupane Magistrates' Court on 30 September 2022. The official opening of the court was testimony to the continued transformation of court infrastructure in line with the policy of the Judicial Service Commission of putting in place measures to ensure easy access to justice for everyone. The event was significant because previously the facilities used by the Magistrates' Court sitting at Lupane were three offices belonging to the District Development Coordinator. Court operations were stifled, as both the judicial officers and the support staff members worked in an unattractive environment that did not inspire public confidence in the Judiciary. This in turn affected the ability to perform their duties efficiently.

It must be noted that, despite this notable achievement, there is still scope for improvement in Matabeleland North Province. This is observable from the fact that, at present, the Province has only four operational

magistrates' court stations. These are located in Victoria Falls, Hwange, Binga and the recently commissioned Lupane court complex. The stations are wholly insufficient to fully accommodate the interests of the large population located in the Province. The people in the Province are having to travel long distances to access the nearest court. This is not ideal. In this regard, the Judicial Service Commission is considering opening resident magistrates' courts at places such as Dete and Kamativi. The institution of the modalities for opening an additional court in the Province is to be undertaken without delay.

On a related note, the Judicial Service Commission continued with the development programme by the resumption of construction at the Gwanda Magistrates' Court Complex in May 2022. This was after a decade long halt due to budgetary constraints. The anticipated commissioning of the facility in 2023 will alleviate the institutional challenges being experienced at the station. At present, the entire court station relies on three courtrooms to service all its functions.

The reason for outlining the ongoing projects is to reinforce the fact that the Judiciary relies on financial support from Government to be able to deliver on its mandate. The success stories in respect of court infrastructure from Bristol House in Harare to Lupane in Matabeleland North that were recorded in 2022 would not have been possible without the support of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works.

It is crucial that this partnership continues, as the Judiciary is committed to the successful implementation of the National Development Strategy 1 (“NDS1”) being pursued by the Government.

The Ministry responsible for Information Technology will play an important role in supporting the Judiciary’s digitisation drive. The Judicial Service Commission Secretariat has already initiated engagements with the Ministry to see how it can provide support in the advancement and realisation of the benefits of the digitisation programme, especially in townships and rural areas, in the areas of the provision of equipment and reliable internet services.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION

The year under review also witnessed the Judicial Service Commission partnering with the COMESA Competition Commission in August in organising and conducting a workshop for Judges on Competition Law and Economic Integration in the COMESA Region. The regional authority, which is an organ of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa Treaty, provided the platform for the end of the second term Judges' Symposium to further capacitate Judges with the necessary skills for the adjudication of competition and consumer law matters. The novel exercise was a resounding success, as the Judiciary's importance and role in the development of a robust economy were canvassed. Judges were also exposed to international best practices in order to aid them in the administration of justice in this technical field. It is hoped the partnership will continue to grow.

The Judiciary's regional participation continues to expand, as Zimbabwe was last year nominated to host the **7th Conference of Constitutional Jurisdictions of Africa** in **2024**, during which **48 countries** will gather

in Victoria Falls. The Judiciary is committed to play its part in the process of the entrenchment of mechanisms of constitutional justice in Africa.

The Judicial Service Commission takes this opportunity to congratulate the **Honourable Mr Justice Manyangadze** for being sworn in as a Judge of the Southern African Development Community Administrative Tribunal and the **Honourable Mrs Justice Charewa** for appointment as the African Union Senior Expert on Legal and Mandate Issues in the African Union Reform Implementation Unit. We wish them success in the execution of their tasks during the tenure of their appointments to the respective regional bodies.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE JUDICIARY

During 2022 there were significant challenges that undermined the attainment of the Judiciary's and the Judicial Service Commission's goals in facilitating the administration of justice in Zimbabwe.

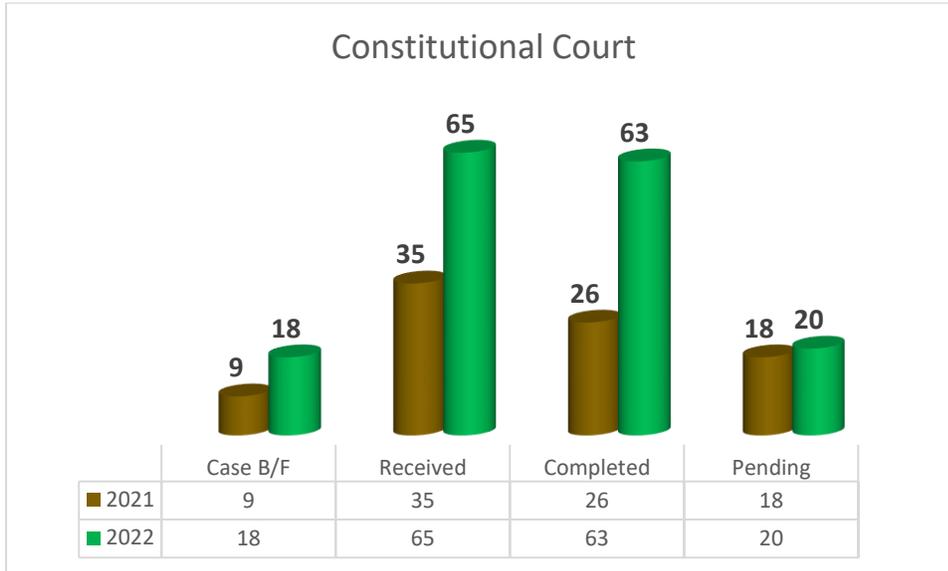
FUNDING CONSTRAINTS

The importance of adequately funding the Judiciary cannot be over-emphasised, as it impacts directly on the rule of law. Funding constraints impact negatively on competence and quality of service in the Judiciary which depend on the availability of commensurate resources. Although the Judicial Service Commission is grateful for the funding received during the period under review, it must be observed that it is undesirable for the Judiciary to be placed in a position in which it has to beseech Treasury to avail funds for its operations, particularly when appropriation of the budgeted funds would have been approved by Parliament. As suggested in previous addresses at the opening of the legal year, block releases of funds on a quarterly basis may be the best solution to the problem.

PERFORMANCE OF THE COURTS IN 2022

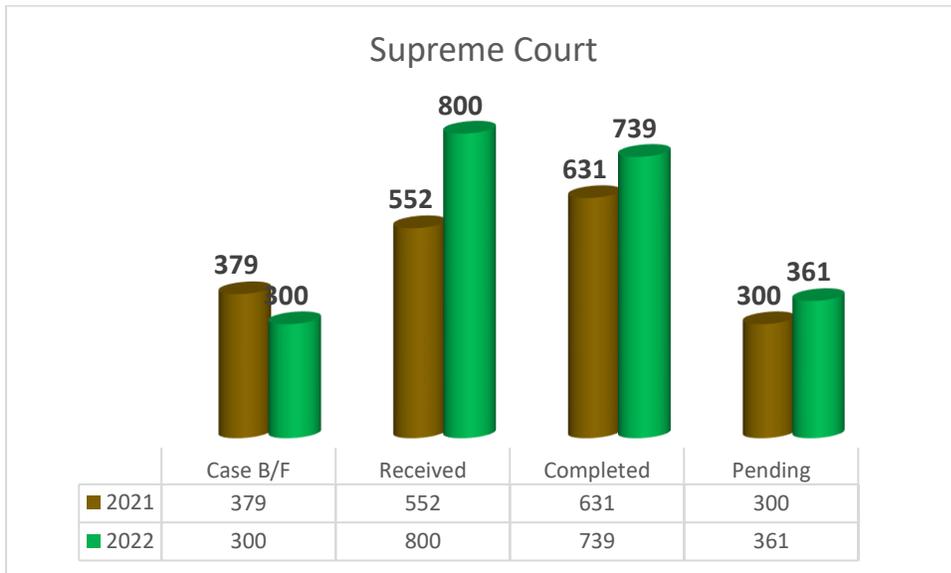
In line with this year's focus on judicial competence, allow me to highlight the performance of the various courts in the past year.

CONSTITUTIONAL COURT



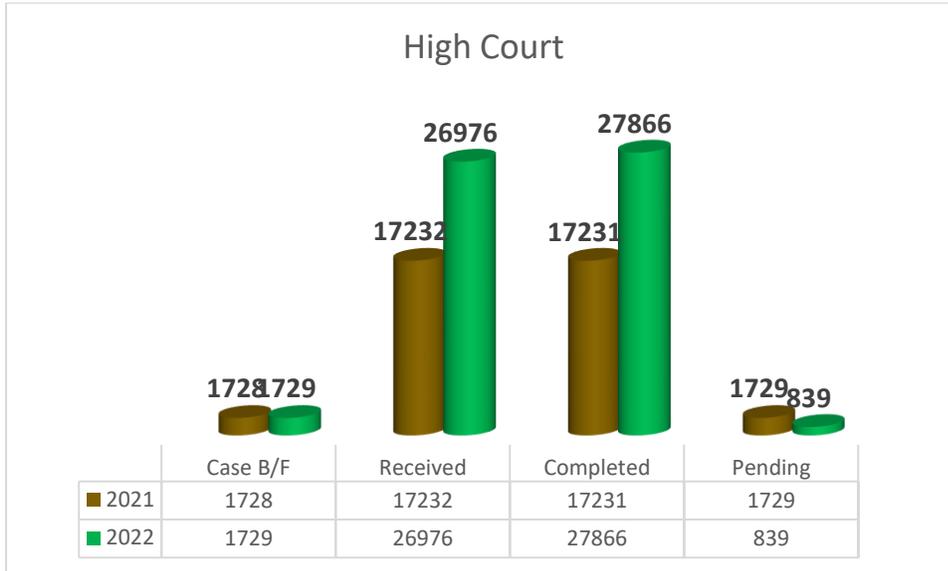
The court completed more cases in 2022 than it did in 2021. There was an increase of **191%** in the number of cases completed. The backlog for the legal year 2022 increased by **2** cases (**28%**), as the court opened the year with **18** cases outstanding and closed with **20** cases being carried over to 2023.

SUPREME COURT



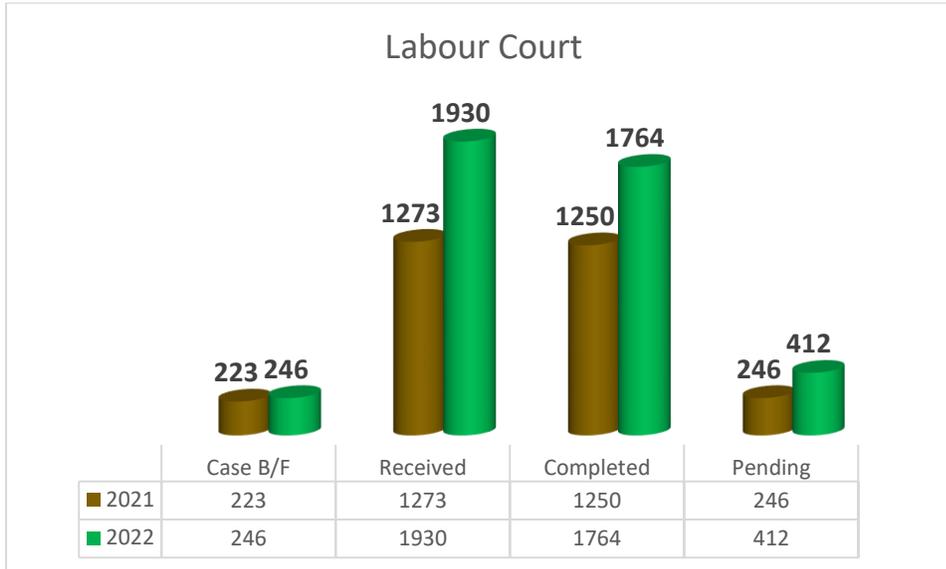
The court received and completed more matters as compared to the previous year. There was an **18%** increase in the workload. There are **361** matters being carried over to 2023. The overall backlog increased by **61** cases. The clearance rate for 2022 was **67%**.

HIGH COURT



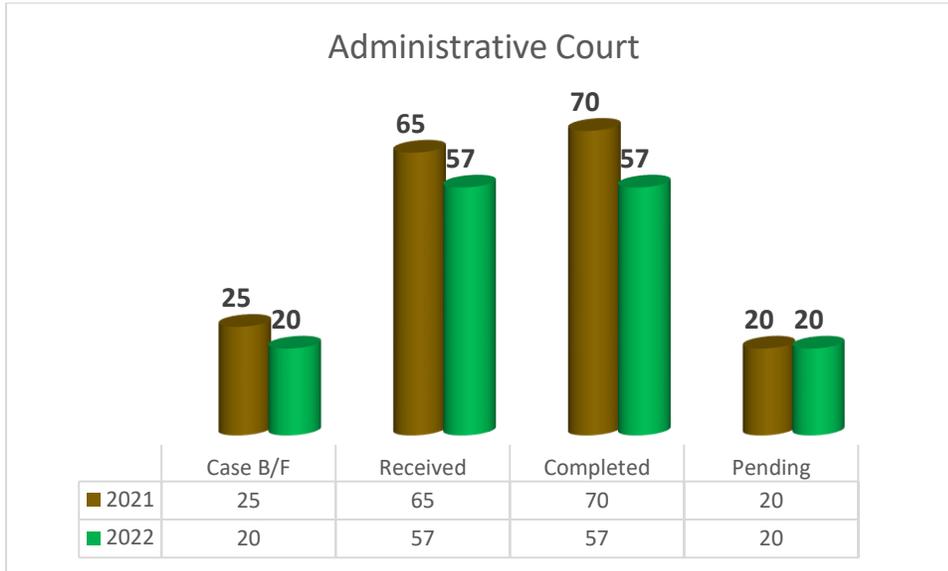
The High Court received **11 273** more matters as compared to 2021. The number of matters completed in the High Court was much higher than in 2021. The general performance of the court was very good compared to the previous year. The backlog went down by **51%**. The Judiciary applauds the Honourable Judges for the good work.

LABOUR COURT



Cases received in 2022 increased by **52%** as compared to 2021. In 2022 the Court received **1 930** cases as compared to the **1 273** cases received in 2021. Completed cases increased by **41%**. The backlog increased by **67%** due to the increase in the number of cases received.

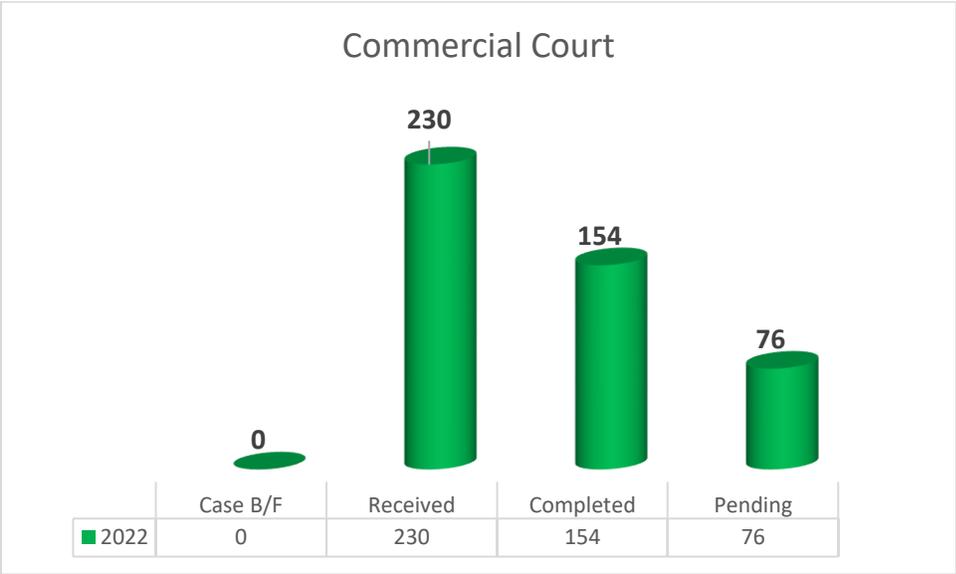
ADMINISTRATIVE COURT



The total workload in 2022 was **77** cases as compared to **90** cases in 2021.

Although the court completed almost all cases received in 2022, completed matters decreased by **19%** as compared to year 2021. **20** matters are being carried over to the 2023 legal year. The backlog remained static.

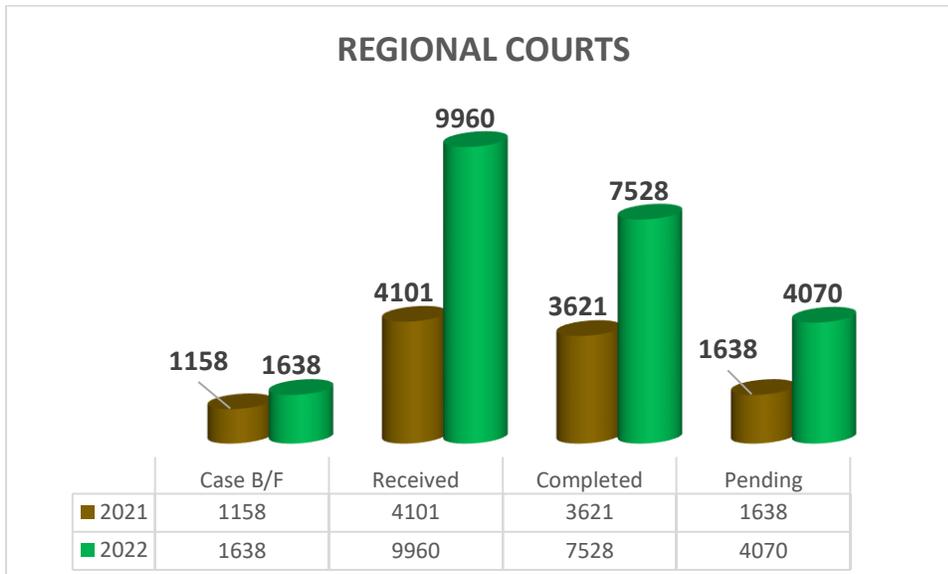
COMMERCIAL COURT



The court only started operating as a standalone Court on 01 May 2022 and it received **230** cases, of which **67%** have been completed, with **76** cases being carried over to the 2023 legal year.

MAGISTRATES COURTS

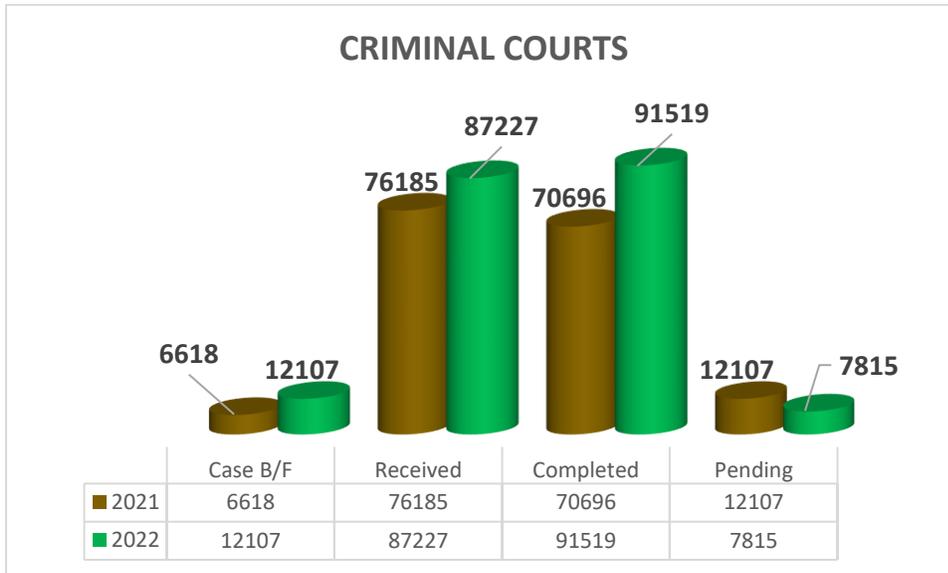
REGIONAL COURTS



The Regional Division received more cases in the year under review, that is, **9 960** cases, as compared to **4 101** cases received in 2021. Completed cases went up by **3 907** matters in 2022. The backlog increased by **2 432**. The clearance rate was **65%** in the year under review as compared to **69%** in 2021. The Regional Division saw a rise in pending cases from **1 638** cases to **4 070** cases - a rise of **2 432** cases, representing a **148%** increase in the backlog. This meteoric rise is attributed to Regional Courts managing their cases from initial remand stage to finalisation, which took

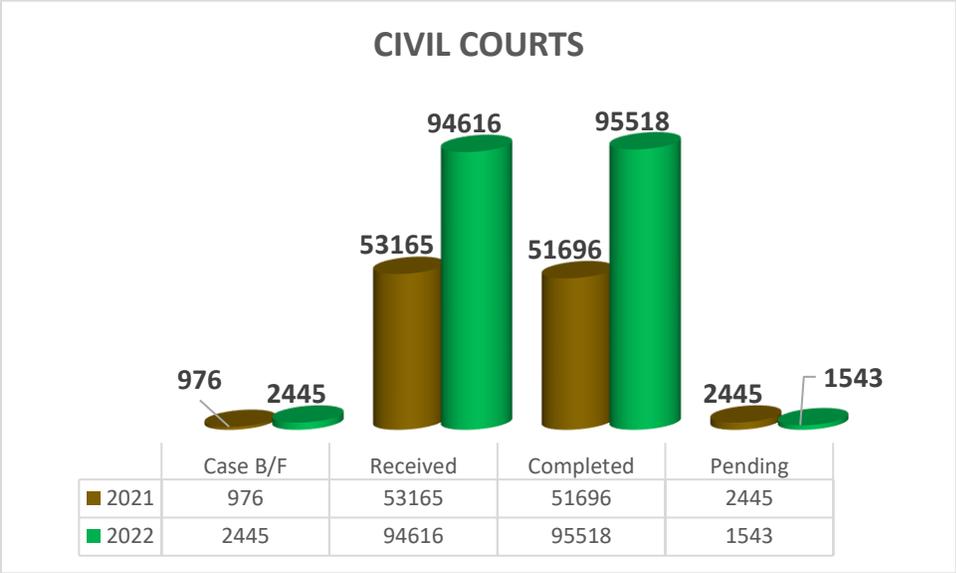
place with effect from 01 July 2022. All Regional Court cases pending in the Provincial Courts were transferred to the respective Regional Courts.

CRIMINAL COURTS



The criminal courts received more cases (that is, **76 185** cases in 2021 compared to **87 227** cases received in 2022) and completed more cases as well when compared with the performance of the previous year (**91 519** cases completed versus the **70 696** cases completed in 2021).

CIVIL COURTS



The civil courts had **2 445** outstanding cases as at 01 January 2022. It received **94 616** matters in 2022 as compared to **53 165** matters in 2021. The clearance rate was **98%** in 2022 as compared to **95%** in 2021.

OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF OF ZIMBABWE

PROCESS	RECEIVED 2021	RECEIVED 2022	DIFFERENCE
WRITS	524	773	(249)
SUMMONS	4385	5367	(982)
COURT ORDERS	390	451	(61)
COURT NOTICES	478	655	(177)
COURT APPLICATIONS	1008	700	308
URGENT CHAMBER APPLICATIONS	174	218	(44)
REMOVALS	251	343	(92)
NOTICES OF SETDOWN	13047	16320	(3273)
TOTAL	20257	24827	(4570)

During 2022 the Office of the Sheriff received a total of 24 827 processes compared to 20 257 for the previous year. The department continued to maintain the clearance rate at 100%, as all processes were served. There was a significant increase in the number of processes served.

CONCLUSION

The nation is due to hold harmonised elections later in the year. The Constitution makes it very clear that every citizen is entitled to peaceful, free and fair elections. The obligation is therefore on all the political parties, the candidates and their agents to ensure that conditions conducive for the holding of peaceful, free and fair harmonised elections are created and maintained. As the Judiciary, we expect the rule of law to prevail, especially in the coming months when political parties start their campaigns. This is the only way that will ensure that the elections are free, fair and credible.

The Judicial Service Commission takes this opportunity to acknowledge the support it received from key stakeholders in the justice delivery system, namely the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, the Law Society of Zimbabwe, the National Prosecuting Authority, the Office of the Attorney-General, the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service, the Zimbabwe Republic

Police, the UNDP, and various other non-governmental organisations who partnered with the Judicial Service Commission in a number of initiatives during the course of 2022. It is hoped that such cooperation will continue in 2023.

The special sitting to mark the opening of the 2023 Legal Year shall now officially close with a prayer, as we beseech the Lord to grant us the wisdom to deliver justice to all in the year ahead. As we stand for the prayer, may we observe a minute of silence in memory of the late Honourable Mr Justice Elijah Makomo, who sadly died on 25 December 2022. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

I now call upon Bishop C Lunga to lead us in prayer, after which the special sitting of the Court will adjourn.

DCJ Adjourns court after prayer