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**CCJ PRESIDENT SAYS INAUGURATION OF REGIONAL COURT VITAL
TO CARIBBEAN INDEPENDENCE**
By Marie Claire Williams

PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad, CMC - President of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), Michael De La Bastide, has described as an "important landmark" Saturday's inauguration of the regional court in Trinidad.

"The launching of the court is a cause for celebration by all Caribbean states who are participating in the economic community that has been created and is being strengthened, I think it is an important landmark in the development of the Caribbean," De La Bastide told the Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC).

He said the CCJ, which will replace the London-based Privy Council as the region's final court of appeal, will "fulfill two long felt and very fundamental needs" of the Caribbean people.

"The need which is to provide the arbitration machinery between the members of a community, the machinery to resolve disputes and interpret the treaty which creates that community, and secondly to replace the Privy Council as our own final Court of Appeal," he said.

"And you know this is an historic event and I think it is a double cause for celebration," he added.

De La Bastide, a former Chief Justice in Trinidad, said he believes the court, which will also interpret the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, which provides the mechanism for the region's quest to establish a CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), could begin receiving its first set of cases by the last quarter of this year.

"We are engaged now in drafting the rules of court, that is a very necessary first step. And it is not a job that can be done in a hurry it is quite an onerous one because we have to draft the rules, set up the rules for two jurisdictions - the original and the appellate," he said.

More than 700 delegates from the region and the wider world have been invited to witness the historic launch of the CCJ at the Queen's Hall, just on the outskirts of the city, on Saturday morning.

The proceedings will begin with an interfaith service featuring five religious groups, and will be followed by addresses from various leaders of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), including host Prime Minister Patrick Manning, Barbados' Owen Arthur

and Dr. Kenny Anthony of St Lucia and President Ronaldo Venetiaan of Suriname as well as CARICOM Secretary General Edwin Carrington.

The ceremony will also involve the swearing in of two judges to the CCJ by De La Bastide.

The launch will culminate with a gala celebration on Saturday night at the official residence of President George Maxwell Richards, featuring cultural performances from regional acts including "Gabby" of Barbados and Denyse Plummer of Trinidad and Tobago.

A fireworks display will bring the curtains down on the day's celebrations.

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