TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

IN THE COURT OF APPEAL

CIV. APP. NO. 45 OF 2007 HCA NO. 117 OF 2003

BETWEEN

MYRTLE CREVELLE, (ADMINISTRATRIX AD LITEM OF THE ESTATE OF CLYDE CREVELLE (deceased))

Appellant

AND

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Respondent

PANEL: KANGALOO, JA MENDONCA, JA BEREAUX, JA

APPEARANCES: J. MOBOTA FOR APPELLANT D. BYAM FOR RESPONDENT

DATE DELIVERED: 28TH JUNE, 2010

JUDGMENT

DELIVERED BY: BEREAUX J.A.

- On 1st October, 1999, the appellant, an attorney at law, was charged with a breach of section 24 of the Summary Courts Act, Chap. 4:20 (the Act). The charge resulted from an exchange between a magistrate and the appellant while the magistrate was presiding over a criminal proceeding in which the appellant was a complainant. His wife and daughter were witnesses. Those proceedings were quite contentious and on several occasions, the magistrate had to caution the appellant about his conduct.
- [2] The conduct which led to the charge took place on 29th September, 1999 after the appellant's daughter was herself charged by the magistrate with the commission of two offences contrary to section 24(d) and (e) of the Act. The magistrate found her guilty and sentenced her to imprisonment of seven days on each charge.
- [3] There followed an outburst from the appellant directed at the magistrate after which he left the court to make arrangements to obtain bail for his daughter. The magistrate, having unsuccessfully ordered that the appellant be brought back before him, issued a warrant for his arrest pursuant to section 25 of the Act.
- [4] The appellant was arrested at 10.00 am on 1st October, 1999 at the Port of Spain Magistrates' Court, fingerprinted and kept in custody at the basement of the court building until 11.45 am, when he was briefly brought before the magistrate. After he was informed of the charge, the matter was stood down until 1.30 pm. The appellant was again confined to the small room in the basement. At 1.30 pm the charge was adjourned to 6th October, 1999. The appellant was placed on his own bail in the sum of one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00) which he secured at 4.00 pm the same day.
- [5] On 5th October, 1999, the appellant commenced judicial review proceedings, challenging the legality of the charge, which culminated in an order by Best J, on

17th January, 2000, quashing the charge. Best J in his written judgment, found that the magistrate admitted in cross-examination that he charged the appellant with "contempt of court" under section 24 of the Act and that section 24 did not create an offence of contempt of court nor could a magistrate charge for contempt of court. There was no appeal from that decision. Mr. Mobota in his submissions before us conceded that the appellant did not seek damages for his detention in the judicial review application. The charge was never heard but the evidence was clear that the appellant was guilty of unbecoming conduct before the magistrate (as Best J. effectively found).

- The appellant then commenced these proceedings on 23rd April, 2003 seeking declarations that the actions and conduct of the magistrate in charging him for "contempt of court" were unconstitutional and that his arrest and imprisonment pursuant to the issued warrant were breaches of his right to the protection of the law, to liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law. He also sought an order for monetary compensation for the deprivation of his liberty.
- [7] The trial judge upheld Mr. Byam's preliminary objection that the motion was an abuse of process. He held as follows:
 - (a) The incarceration of the appellant, even if it were in breach of the law, was the result of an error of law which was liable to correction on appeal (as provided for by sections 26 and 128 of the Act).
 - (b) In doing so, the full protection of the law was available to the claimant for correcting such errors in the judicial process (per **Maharaj v A.G** (No.2) 1979 A.C. 385 at 399).
 - (c) It is only in rare cases where there has been a fundamental subversion of the rule of law that resort to constitutional redress is likely to be appropriate.

(d) There were available to the claimant, quite apart from his right to challenge his incarceration on appeal, remedies at common law for wrongful arrest, false imprisonment and malicious prosecution to which he could have resorted.

As a result, the appellant's constitutional motion was dismissed as being an abuse of process.

[8] The appellant died before this appeal could be heard and his wife was substituted in his place. For the purposes of this appeal, I shall continue to refer to him as the appellant. The respondent initially sought to argue that the appeal could not survive him. However, at the commencement of argument before us, counsel for the respondent, Mr. Byam, did not pursue the point.

Grounds of Appeal

- [9] The appellant filed the following grounds of appeal:
 - (a) the trial judge misdirected himself in finding that an appellate option was open to the appellant with respect to the order of Magistrate Waldropt that a warrant be issued against him;
 - (b) the trial judge failed to consider sufficiently or at all that the presence of a parallel remedy does not always render a constitutional application an abuse of process and in the present case would not have so rendered the application;
 - (c) the decision of the trial judge was wrong in law;
 - (d) the decision of the trial judge was against the weight of the evidence led before him.

- Ground (d) can be discounted since the issues in this appeal are all points of law. Ground (b), even though meritorious, does not ultimately fall to be considered because, as I have found in this appeal, the appellant did not have a parallel remedy. As to ground (a), the finding of the trial judge was to the effect that the appellant had a right of appeal against his imprisonment, the imposition of which was an error of law liable to correction in a successful appeal. I consider that the judge was wrong in his finding because the appellant was never convicted of an offence and sentenced to a term of imprisonment from which lay a right of appeal. The appellant's imprisonment was consequent upon his arrest by warrant issued by the magistrate. There was no right of appeal from such an imprisonment. At best, the appellant would have had a cause of action in tort. But as will be seen, no such cause of action existed by virtue of the Magistrates Protection Act, Chap. 6:03 (the MPA).
- [11] The judge applied the decision of the Privy Council in Maharaj v The Attorney

 General of Trinidad & Tobago (No. 2) (1978) 30 WIR 310, as later explained
 by the Privy Council in Independent Publishing Co. Ltd & Others v The

 Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago [2004] UKPC 26, to the effect that
 an error of law which can be corrected on appeal, does not entitle the person
 wrongly convicted by that error, to constitutional relief.
- The law as set out in both decisions, requires examination but ultimately, is not relevant to this appeal. In Maharaj v A.G. of T&T (No.2) the appellant, an attorney at law, had been committed to prison for seven days for contempt of court. The order for committal was subsequently held to have been improperly made (See Maharaj v. A.G. (No.1) (1976) 29 W.I.R.318) because "in charging him with contempt, the judge did not make plain to him the particulars or the specific nature of the contempt with which he was being charged". At that date there was no right of appeal to the Trinidad and Tobago Court of Appeal against such an order but an appeal lay directly to the Privy Council by way of special leave. The appellant moved the Privy Council for special leave and succeeded in the appeal. However, by the time the appeal was heard, he had already served the

sentence. He then applied for monetary compensation under section 6 of the 1962 Constitution (section 14 of the present Constitution) claiming that he had been deprived of his liberty without due process.

- [13] The claim in <u>Maharaj</u> No. 2 was upheld by the Privy Council. Lord Diplock, delivering the judgment of the Board, held that the committal order of the judge was made by him in the exercise of the judicial powers of the State and that the subsequent arrest and detention of the appellant in that case was effected by the executive arm of the State. As such, his detention was a contravention by the State, of his right to liberty.
- [14] Lord Diplock had to consider (in light of a strong dissent by Lord Hailsham of St. Maryleborne) whether this finding could undermine the principle that a judge cannot be made personally liable in court proceedings for an act done in the exercise of his judicial functions. In answering that question he said at page 320:

"It has been urged on their Lordships (on behalf of the Attorney General) that so to decide would be to subvert the long - established rule of public policy that a judge cannot be made personally liable in court proceedings for anything done by him in the exercise (or purported exercise) of his judicial functions. It was this consideration which weighed heavily with Sir Isaac Hyatali CJ and Corbin JA in reaching their conclusion that the appellant's claim for redress should fail. Their Lordships, however, think that these fears are exaggerated.

In the first place, no human right of fundamental freedom recognized by Chapter I of the Constitution is contravened by a judgment or order that is wrong and liable to be set aside on appeal for an error of fact or substantive law, even where the error has resulted in a person's serving a sentence of imprisonment. The remedy for errors of these kinds is to appeal to a higher court. When there is no higher court to appeal to then none can say that there was error. The fundamental human right is not to a legal system that is infallible but to one that is fair. It is only errors in procedure that are capable of constituting infringements of the rights protected by s.1(a), and no mere irregularity in procedure is enough, even though it goes to jurisdiction; the error must amount to a failure to observe one of the fundamental rules of natural justice. Their Lordships do not believe that this can be anything but a very rare event.

In the second place, no change is involved in the rule that a judge cannot be made personally liable for what he has done when acting or purporting to act in a judicial capacity. The claim for redress under s.6(1) for what has been done by a judge is a claim against the State for what has been done in the exercise of the judicial power of the State. This is not vicarious liability; it is a liability of the State itself. It is not a liability in tort at all; it is a liability in the public law of the State, not of the judge himself, which has been newly created by s 6(1) and (2) of the Constitution.

In the third place, even a failure by a judge to observe one of the fundamental rules of natural justice does not bring the case within s 6 unless it has resulted, is resulting or is likely to result, in a person being deprived of life, liberty, security of the person or enjoyment of property. It is only in the case of imprisonment or corporal punishment undergone before an appeal can be heard that the consequences of the judgment or order cannot be put right on an appeal to an appellant court."

- In <u>Independent Publishing Co Ltd and others v The AG of T&T</u> the scope of <u>Maharaj No. 2</u> was explained. The appellants in that case included two journalists who were convicted of contempt of court by a trial judge during a criminal trial. One was fined and the other, Mr. Ali, was immediately committed to prison for fourteen days. He appealed against his conviction some three days later and one day later was released on bail by the Court of Appeal, having spent a total of four days in jail. He sought redress under section 14(1) of the Constitution seeking redress alleging, *inter alia*, that he had been deprived of his liberty without due process of law.
- [16] The Privy Council held that in deciding whether an individual's right to liberty had been violated, it was the legal system as a whole which must be looked at, not merely one part of it. Since Mr. Ali had been able to secure his release on bail pending his appeal against his conviction for contempt, his position was essentially no different from that of any person convicted of an offence. Since any shortcomings in the first hearing could be made good on the appeal and by the grant of bail, the system as a whole was fair and accordingly, Mr. Ali had enjoyed the benefit of due process.
- [17] Lord Brown of Eaton under Heywood, delivering the judgment of the Privy Council, considered Lord Diplock's dictum to which I have just referred, as well as the dissenting judgment of Lord Hailsham of St. Maryleborne and said:

"Lord Diplock's judgment has been widely understood to allow for constitutional redress, including the payment of compensation, to anyone whose conviction (a) resulted from a procedural error amounting to a failure to observe one of the fundamental rules of natural justice, and (b) resulted in his losing his liberty before an appeal could be heard. That, however, is not their Lordships' view of the effect of the decision. Of critical importance to its true understanding is that Mr. Maharaj had no right of appeal to the Court of Appeal against his committal and equally, therefore, no right to apply for bail pending such an appeal.

In deciding whether someone's section 4(a) "right not to be deprived (of their liberty) except by due process of law" has been violated, it is the legal system as a whole which must be looked at, not merely one part of it. The fundamental human right, as Lord Diplock said, is to "a legal system... that is fair". Where, as in Mr. Maharaj's case, there was no avenue of redress (save only an appeal by special leave direct to the Privy Council) from a manifestly unfair committal to prison, then, despite Lord Hailsham's misgivings on the point, one can understand why the legal system should be characterized as unfair. Where, however, as in the present case, Mr. Ali was able to secure his release on bail within four days of his committal – indeed, within only one day of his appeal to the Court of Appeal – their Lordships would hold the legal system as a whole to be a fair one.

Once someone committed to prison for contempt of court could appeal in Trinidad and Tobago to the Court of Appeal, and meantime apply for release on bail, his position became essentially no different from that of a person convicted of any other offence. Convicted persons cannot in the ordinary way, even if ultimately successful on appeal, seek constitutional relief in respect of their time in prison. The authorities are clear on the point."

Independent Publishing. In this case, the appellant was never convicted of an offence. As such, the analogy drawn by Lord Diplock and Lord Brown, in respect of a convicted person who is vindicated on appeal but who loses his liberty through a fair but fallible legal process, cannot strictly be made here. The matter

- never proceeded to conviction. The appellant's imprisonment was consequent upon the issue of a warrant of arrest by the Magistrate.
- [19] Mr. Byam's submission was to the effect that the legal system was fair to the appellant in that it provided the remedy of certiorari to quash the charge by way of judicial review proceedings. He contended that this brought the appellant within the *ratio decidendi* in **Maharaj** and **Independent Publishing**. In my judgment the submission is misconceived. The decision of Best J effectively meant that the charge initiated by the magistrate was illegal, as was the warrant issued for the appellant's arrest. Since both were illegal, the appellant's imprisonment was also illegal. The appellant's position was thus no different from that of a person who was falsely imprisoned or maliciously prosecuted as a result of a wrongful arrest and false charge and was thus entitled (unless barred by statute or common law) to an award of damages.

The Magistrates Protection Act

- [20] The appellant would thus ordinarily have been entitled to pursue his common law remedies in tort for the false imprisonment and malicious prosecution. However, the effect of the Magistrates Protection Act, Chap. 6:03 (the MPA) which governs the liability of magistrates in the exercise of their official function, is to prohibit the appellant from taking any action against the magistrate. The relevant provisions are sections 3, 4, 5 & 6. They provide as follows:
 - (3) "Every action to be brought against any Magistrate for any act purporting to have been done by him in the execution of his office shall be brought in the High Court.
 - (4) The endorsement of the writ of summons in every such action shall allege either that the act was done maliciously and without reasonable and probable cause, or that it was done in a matter not within the jurisdiction of the Magistrate, otherwise the writ shall be set aside on

summons; and if the plaintiff fails at the trial to prove the allegation, a verdict shall be given for the defendant.

- (5) (1) Any person injured by any act done by a Magistrate in a matter not within his jurisdiction, or in excess of his jurisdiction, or by any act done in any such matter under any conviction or order made or warrant issued by him, may maintain an action against the Magistrate without alleging that the act complained of was done maliciously and without any reasonable and probable cause.
 - (2) No such action shall be brought for anything done under the conviction or order, or for anything done under any warrant issued by the Magistrate to procure the appearance of such party and followed by a convict ion or order in the same matter, until after the conviction or order has been quashed by the High Court.
- (6) No action shall in any case be brought against any Magistrate for anything done under any warrant which has not been followed by a conviction or order, or if, being a warrant upon an information for an alleged indictable offence, a summons was issued previously thereto, and served upon such person personally, or by its being left for him with some person at his usual or last know place of abode, and he has not appeared in obedience thereto."
- [21] The Act, as its name suggests, is intended to protect magistrates and justices of the peace from actions brought against them in respect of actions done in the course of their duty. Its provisions are no doubt based on the Justices Protection

Act 1848, in England said by Ormond J to have been "the culmination of a number of Acts designed to protect justices from civil litigation arising out of their functions as justices which, as Blackstone observed, was a serious detriment to recruitment", see **R v Manchester City Magistrate's Court, ex parte Davies** [1989] 1 QB 631, 648. As to the rationale for such protection, Lord Denning in **Sirros v Moore** [1976] QB 118, 136, observed that:

"Each should be protected from liability to damages when he is acting judicially. Each should be able to do his work in complete independence and free from fear. He should not have to turn the pages of his books with trembling fingers, asking himself: If I do this, shall I be liable in damages."

- [22] Section 4 gives a right of action against a magistrate in respect of an act done by him in the execution of his duty which is done maliciously and without reasonable and probable cause. It follows that an action alleging malice would normally be in respect of an act of a magistrate done within jurisdiction.
- [23] Where, however, in any matter, a magistrate does an act not within his jurisdiction or in excess of his jurisdiction, section 5(1) gives a right of action to:
 - (i) any person injured by that act;
 - (ii) any person injured by any act done, in that matter, under any conviction or order made by the magistrate;
 - (iii) any person injured by any act done, in that matter, pursuant to any warrant issued by the magistrate.

However, no action shall be brought in respect of any injury under (ii) above, unless the conviction or order made by the magistrate is first quashed by the High Court. Further, if the warrant issued by the magistrate was for the procuring of the appearance of the party injured and such appearance resulted in a conviction or order being made against him by the magistrate, no action shall be brought by the injured party unless the conviction or order is quashed. It is thus "the

- conviction or order" which is the cause of action (see **Halsbury's** Statutes of England Vol. 14, page 802, footnote 4).
- [24] In this case, the availability of a remedy to the appellant was solely dependent upon whether the magistrate acted without jurisdiction or in excess of jurisdiction because, even if the appellant were to have alleged that the magistrate acted maliciously (but within jurisdiction), it could not be said that he acted without reasonable and probable cause, given the findings of Best J when he quashed the charge.
- [25] The initial question to be answered in this case therefore is whether the magistrate acted "within or in excess of jurisdiction" when he purported to charge the appellant. The term "jurisdiction" has varied meanings. Indeed, Lord Bridge in **Re McC (A Minor)** [1985] A.C. 528, 536, in construing "jurisdiction" said that:

"There are many words in common usage in the law which have no precise or constant meaning. But few, I think, have been used with so many different shades of meaning in different contexts or have so freely acquired new meanings with the development of the law as the word jurisdiction."

For the purposes of the civil liability of magistrates it is important to note that the term "jurisdiction" does not have the same meaning as originally conceived by the House of Lords in Anisminic Ltd v Foreign Compensation Commission [1969] 2 A.C. 147, 171. The law with respect to a magistrate's civil liability was succinctly put by Neil L.J. in R v Manchester City Magistrates Court ex parte

Davies [1989] 1 Q.B. 631. That case involved a decision on the civil liability of the Manchester City Justices for wrongly committing the applicant in that case to prison for non-payment of rates. The justices were afforded protection under Part V of the UK Justices of the Peace Act, 1979, by provisions quite similar to our own MPA. Section 45(1) of the UK Act denied protection to justices in respect of:

"...any act done by a justice of the peace in a matter in respect of which by law he does not have jurisdiction or in which he has exceeded his jurisdiction..."

[27] In R. v Manchester City Magistrates Court ex parte Davies Neil L.J. accurately summarized the law on the meaning of the word "jurisdiction" in the following way:

"It is to be noted that in <u>Anisminic Ltd v Foreign Compensation</u> <u>Commission</u>, Lord Reid expressed the opinion that it was better not to use the term "except in the narrow and original sense of the tribunal being entitled to enter on the inquiry in question." It is plain, however, that in section 45(1) "jurisdiction" has a wider meaning than this original meaning.

In his judgment in the present case [1988] 1 W.L.R. 667, 671, Simon Brown J. concluded that it was established by the decision of the House of Lords in Re McC that there were three categories of case in which justices would be regarded as either not having jurisdiction or as having exceeded their jurisdiction. I do not find it necessary to decide in the present case whether these three categories are all-embracing, but I am content for the purposes of the present case gratefully to adopt the judge's analysis. In the first category are cases where the justices do not have "jurisdiction of the cause" to use the phrase of Lord Coke in the Marshalsea Case (1613) 10 Co. Rep. 68b, 76a. A simple example of a case in this category is provided by Houlden v Smith (1850) 14 Q.B. 841, where the plaintiff recovered damages because he had been imprisoned by the order of a county court judge whose jurisdiction was limited to a geographical area which did not

include the town where the plaintiff lived and carried on his business. In the second category are cases where the justices have properly entered on a summary trial of a matter within their jurisdiction but where "something quite exceptional" has occurred in the course of the proceedings so as to oust their jurisdiction. In Re McC (A Minor) at pgs 546-547, Lord Bridge gave as an example of such an exceptional event: a case where a justice absented himself for part of the hearing, and then relied on another justice to tell him what had happened during his absence. Lord Bridge expressed the opinion that in such a case, because of the gross and obvious irregularity of the procedure, the justices would have acted without jurisdiction or in excess of jurisdiction. As will appear when I come to consider the relevant legislation and the facts, the third category of cases is the one which has particular relevance in the present appeal. In this third category are cases where, although the justices have "jurisdiction of the cause" and may have conducted the trial impeccably, they may nevertheless be liable in damages on the ground of acting in excess of jurisdiction if their conviction of the defendant or other determination does not provide a proper foundation in law for the sentence or order made against him."

In **Re McC (A Minor)**, the respondent had been ordered by the justices to be detained at a training school after having breached a prior sentence which had required that he attend an attendance centre. It was common ground that the respondent had been properly tried and convicted but the justices were still held to have acted without jurisdiction or in excess of jurisdiction in ordering his detention because, the respondent was not represented at the hearing and had not been informed of his right to apply for legal aid as had been required by statute. It was therefore held that a statutory condition precedent (as provided by Article 15(1) of the Treatment of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1976), had not been

observed. This took the justices outside of their jurisdiction or in excess of their jurisdiction.

[29] In setting out the categories of cases in which justices were to be regarded as acting without or in excess of jurisdiction, Lord Bridge in **Re McC** warned against a simple carte blanche application of the *Anisminic* principles, expressing strong disapproval of the view that:

"the extended concept of acting without jurisdiction or in excess of jurisdiction as introduced by the decision in Anisminic," was to be applied "to extend the range of justices' potential liability under section 15 of the Northern Ireland Act of 1964" (see page 542E of Re McC), adding (at page 544E) that, "the quashing of a decision or order by certiorari for want of jurisdiction, cannot be conclusive against the justices on the issue of their civil liability at all events where they have erred, even by misdirecting themselves in deciding some collateral issue which it is necessary for them to decide..."

[30] I have borne these factors in mind in considering the question in this case. There was no appeal from the decision of Best J, thus his ruling and findings are final. I must therefore proceed to examine the actions of the magistrate on the basis of his ruling and findings of fact. I entertain no doubt that, having regard to the findings of Best J. in the judicial review proceedings, the magistrate acted without jurisdiction or in excess of jurisdiction within the meaning of section 5 of the MPA. That he had jurisdiction to charge the appellant under section 24 of the Act is without question but in exercising that jurisdiction he was required to confine himself within the parameters of section 24. As a creature of statute he must act within his powers as set out in the Act. By charging the appellant for "contempt of court", he exceeded his powers under the Act and his "jurisdiction" and fell within the third category as propounded by Neil L.J. in Manchester City Magistrates ex p. Davies, since the charge had no proper foundation in law.

- [31] The magistrate, having wrongly charged the appellant and having issued a warrant for his arrest as a result of the charge, would be liable for all the consequences which naturally flow from those acts. The fact that the appellant's detention was a consequence of the magistrate's act, would ordinarily have brought him under the first limb of section 5(1) of the Act as I have set it out in paragraph 23 above. However, the appellant was detained pursuant to the issue of a warrant of arrest by the magistrate, which brings this case within section 6 of the MPA. Because there was no conviction or order which resulted from the charge, the magistrate is protected from civil liability by section 6.
- [32] Under section 6, anything done under the authority of a warrant issued by a magistrate is not actionable against the magistrate, if there were no resulting conviction or order. Section 6 contemplates, ordinarily, a situation in which a person appears in court on a warrant issued by a magistrate and the matter which is the subject of the warrant is resolved in his favour with the result that there is no "conviction or order" made against him. "Order", in both sections 5 and 6 thus refers to a final order made after a substantive hearing of the charge or matter before the magistrate.
- [33] In this case the appellant was detained by virtue of the warrant of the magistrate but there was no conviction or order because the charge was quashed before a hearing was conducted by the magistrate. The detention thus falls within section 6 as being something "done under any warrant which has not been followed by a conviction or order". While this does not fit classically within the contemplation of section 6, the wording of section 6 is broad enough to bring this case within its provisions. The fact is that there has been no "conviction or order" and the effect is to protect the magistrate from any private law action.
- [34] Section 8 (4) of the Judicial Review Act Chap. 7:08 provides for the award of damages in judicial review proceedings if the court is satisfied that a claimant could have been awarded damages in a private action at the time of the bringing

of the judicial review proceedings. The appellant could not have sought damages

in light of the provisions of section 6. The result is that no award of damages

could have been made by Best J even if the appellant had sought such relief. The

appellant could not have pursued damages at common law for wrongful arrest or

false imprisonment.

[35] In the result the trial judge was wrong to find that the motion was an abuse of

process for reasons he gave. The appeal is allowed. We will hear arguments on

costs and the further conduct of these proceedings.

N.P.G. BEREAUX Justice of Appeal

I have read the judgment written by Bereaux J A. I agree with it and have nothing to add.

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W. KANAGALOO Justice of Appeal

I, too, have read the judgment written by Bereaux J A. I also agree with it and have

nothing to add.

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A. MENDONCA Justice of Appeal