

**LESLIE WILKINS 2ND ARMSA PRESIDENT
1996 - 1997**



As you no doubt know I was ARMSA chairperson from October 1996 to November 1997. I followed Theo Reed (the first chair) and was in turn followed by Trevor Levitt. Theo identified a plethora of issues which he took up with the then Justice Minister Mr. Dullah Omar. As could be expected lesser issues were targeted by his office and the Justice Department first while those of much greater importance to us were put on the back burner. It was so that I inherited two of the most burning issues:

1. SALARIES (many will recall the infamous 43% hike for the Regional Court Presidents against our 19% hike in July 1996 which was quickly accepted by our two "representatives" (two presidents) on the Commission.)

2. CARS. (A benefit enjoyed by those Presidents but not by us!)

In order to try and solve these issues I had two meetings with the Minister. While he seemed to be earnest I cannot say the same of certain Head Office people. One blatantly tried to mislead us about Judges benefits and had to be corrected at the next meeting.

It soon became obvious that the biggest impediment to decent car allowances and salaries was head office. However at every opportunity the Minister was made alive to our plight. I don't know if I was the first to do so but I suggested to the Minister that there should ideally be no "horse trading" with the Executive over judicial salaries and mooted an independent commission to fix or recommend our salaries.

Much to my surprise he seemed to welcome the idea and gave instructions that it be promoted. If this paved the way or facilitated the current position will probably never be known but I will be forgiven for thinking so because with Government one soon learns that time is their luxury. One will not soon forget the stock answer to any letter: "The Minister will respond in due course." During my tenure we attempted to get rid of travelling with prosecutors and furnishing statistics. We succeeded with the former (despite some resistance from some of our very own colleagues) but failed with the latter.

On the car issue it was a slow process. One first had to overcome resistance. Then the excuse was "we deserved cars" but the country cannot afford it." This excuse persisted until Trevor Levitt showed head office which drawer the money was in and so all impediments were eventually out of the way. I often joke that we did better than Ferrari. It took us 17 years? To get cars for Regional magistrates reintroduced but it took Ferrari 21 years to regain the F1 title.

It would seem that even 10 years on we still have other public servants piggy backing on our benefits. We are still grouped with them in Government's way of thinking despite the van Rooyen case. There are many rivers to cross and ARMSA has its work cut out for it. May it go from strength to strength!

Leslie Wilkins.