



**IN THE SUPREME COURT OF GIBRALTAR**

**VALEDICTORY CEREMONY TO MARK THE RETIREMENT**  
**OF**  
**JUDGE RAMAGGE**

Held at 12:00 noon on 04 January 2024

**Valedictory Ceremony held by the Court in to mark the retirement of Judge Ramagge before Mr Justice Dudley Chief Justice, Mr Justice Yeats, and Mr Justice Restano**

**DUDLEY CJ:**

We come together today to mark the retirement of the person formally known as Mrs Justice Ramagge Prescott, although I will drop the formality and speak of my good friend Karen.

I welcome you all, especially Karen's partner Ian and mother Joan. I know Karen's son Wilco and daughter Cecilia would want to be here because they are both extraordinary proud of her achievements.

More usually a valedictory for a retiring judge would be held on their last sitting day but her precipitous departure from the Bench and her appointment as Speaker of our Parliament has meant that we are holding this event after her retirement. It is rather ironic that the person who has most held me in check when trying to dispense with robes should be sat next to me in a suit.

To me this is a day of mixed emotions, principally of sadness but also of institutional pride. Sadness because I am saying a professional goodbye to a good

friend and colleague with whom I have had the privilege, and it has been a real privilege, to work with for sixteen years. Pride because her very significant contribution to our administration of justice has so positively reflected upon the courts.

Judge Ramagge or Madam Speaker as she now is, was called to the Gibraltar Bar on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1988. At the time she was only one of a handful of women lawyers, one of whom was Janice Evans with whom she shared offices at the chambers of the late Guy Stagnetto Queens Counsel. In 1990 she was appointed Crown Counsel earning a well-deserved reputation as a dedicated and effective prosecutor. I regret to say that when we were on opposite sides almost invariably, I came second.

But what we celebrate today is Karen's illustrious and long career on the Bench. Appointed as Acting Stipendiary Magistrate in 2007 she very quickly made her mark and was appointed as acting Puisne in 2009 and substantively in 2010. I do not think that anyone has alighted upon the fact that having served substantively for thirteen years and eight months, it almost sounds like a prison sentence, she has been the longest serving Puisne Judge in the jurisdiction.

Karen's judicial ability across a wide range of jurisdictions has been demonstrated time and again although I can say with some certainty that her real vocation has been crime, if clarification is required, I mean judging criminal matters not participating in any such activity. On occasions stern, some might even say slightly intimidating, she has with the human limitations we all have, always dealt with cases with fairness, justice and humanity. One cannot ask for more in a judge. That she has earned the respect of the profession and the wider community is no mean feat in a small jurisdiction such as ours.

Karen has broken and continues to break glass ceilings but I know that what she most wants is for many other women to follow in her footsteps. I cannot think of anyone better qualified to have become the Speaker of our Parliament. The Judiciary's loss is Parliament's gain. Mr Director.

**Mr Christian Rocca KC, Director of Public Prosecutions:**

May I please My Lord, Lordships, Madam Speaker, members of the bar, guests. I am privileged to address the Court today, on this special occasion, on behalf of Her Majesty's Attorney General, who extends his sincere apologies for not being able to attend today.

I am fortunate to have had sight of my learned friend's skeleton arguments, so I do not propose to repeat what she is going to say. But, suffice to say, and as Your Lordship has already mentioned, Madam Speaker has had a career of firsts. Notary Public, Magistrate, Puisne Judge, first female to be Master of the Bench of The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple, female Speaker of the House. My Lord, it is one which is unparalleled in Gibraltar and I do not propose to rehearse what will be said by my learned friend shortly about her distinguished judicial career and by Your Lordship. But without a doubt Madam Speaker has blazed a trail of firsts, especially for women in Gibraltar and she is a role model for those women and many women have mentioned that to me in passing, to look up to, to admire and aspire to being.

As someone who has appeared regularly before Madam Speaker many years now, sixteen approximately, starting first in the Magistrates Court, then the Supreme Court, both as a defence lawyer and then as DPP, I think I can provide some insight on Judge Ramagge.

One thing that always shone through was her firmness and fairness. All those that have appeared before her would undoubtedly agree with that sentiment. She always allowed you to make your point fully, before shooting you down in flames. As a criminal judge, she acquired and developed and amassed a wealth of knowledge in practice and procedure and she was never shy when firmly handling PCMH's to ensure cases progressed properly and with due speed and diligence.

Importantly, always balancing the considerations of the victim and the defendant at both times. She has always maintained a fairness and balance to proceedings before

her, and it is not for me to say My Lord, but might I respectfully say that on the criminal Bench and the family Bench she will take some replacing.

Finally, one thing that some people may not know about Madam Speaker is that we both share a special passion and that is for all things Italian. Like myself, Madam Speaker is a self-confessed Italophile and loves immersing herself fully in the language, cuisine and the culture of Italy. Even though not retiring strictly speaking, of course her new role will be challenging and time consuming no doubt in its own way. I hope now that as Madam Speaker, you will have more time to pursue that passion and to sit on some rolling hill in Tuscany and sip a lovely glass of Chianti, My Lord.

Chief Justice; Ms Lejeune

**Ms Lejeune Vice Chair:**

Chief Justice, Judge Ramagge, members of the judiciary, fellow members of the legal profession and esteemed guests. I am humbled today to have been given the honour of delivering this speech to commemorate the valedictory of Judge Ramagge.

As we all come together to celebrate this momentous occasion, I would like to say a few words about Judge Ramagge and the invaluable contributions she has made to the legal profession in Gibraltar. As a fellow female lawyer, I have always had great admiration for Judge Ramagge and the pioneering path she has set during the course of her career. As a woman she has set many firsts, as my learned friend mentioned, to her achievements paving the way for other female members of the profession.

In 2007 Judge Ramagge, a then Barrister, was the first woman to be appointed Notary Public here in Gibraltar. She was thereafter appointed Stipendiary Magistrate & Coroner for Gibraltar, leaving her role as a practising barrister to join the judiciary.

In 2010 she set another precedent by becoming the first female to be appointed Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Gibraltar, a role that she served in to this day.

Additionally in 2017, she became the first Gibraltarian woman to have been made a Master of the Bench of The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple, a very rare privilege bestowed upon only a handful of persons which are mainly from the UK.

True to her form, she ended her legal career with yet another first, by becoming the first female Speaker of the Gibraltar Parliament. Throughout her tenure as Puisne Judge, she has demonstrated her unwavering commitment to the legal services community and her dedication to upholding the principles of justice. Her distinguished service to the judiciary and the legal profession in general as well as the commitment to public service, has been underpinned with integrity, fairness and a profound understanding of the law. Through her wisdom and her judgment, she has over the years helped shape Gibraltar's judicial system, fostering an environment of respect, impartiality and diligence.

Although I am not a litigator and have therefore not been privileged to appear before Judge Ramagge in her professional capacity, I have had the privilege of interacting with her on occasions. Not only is she an exemplary member of the legal profession and judiciary, but she is also a lovely person, warm, approachable and a true professional in her manner.

And so as Judge Ramagge embarks on this new chapter as Speaker of the House, I, and I am sure that I speak for the entire legal profession in Gibraltar, am confident that she will continue to pave the way making a positive difference in our community and politics as we know it.

As we bid her farewell from her legal family, we not only express a sincere gratitude for her service and commitment to our profession and the judiciary over the years, but we also celebrate all of her incredible achievements of which our entire profession can be very proud.

Although she will be moving onto a new field, the marks that she has made on our legal services framework and justice system will forever remain a part of our community.

With that said, on behalf of our legal profession, I extend a heartfelt thanks to Judge Ramagge for her invaluable contribution to our judiciary and offer our congratulations on this very well-deserved appointment as Speaker of the House. We hope that this new chapter is filled with continued success, further accomplishments and have no doubt that she will continue to excel in her new role.

**Chief Justice;**

Although you may speak elsewhere, for a final time in this court room, Judge Ramagge.

**Judge Ramagge;**

I am grateful to you Chief Justice, Mr Director and Ms Lejune for your kind words. I wonder if you have all conspired to bring me to the brink of my emotions. Taking a deep breath, I ask myself what if the then acting Chief Justice had not asked me to help out as provisional Stipendiary Magistrate in the Magistrates' Court during the Derek Schofield enquiry. What if, if I had listened to my doubts, and had not applied for the position of Puisne Judge, how different my life might have been. As I tell my children, choices have consequences and the consequence of my appointment to the Supreme Court Bench have made for a rich and full professional life, which in turn has enriched my personal life.

When I look back at my time on the Bench, the years seem to have passed in a matter of days. I vividly recall donning my pristine robes for the first time, with shaking hands and trembling knees. I do not feel any older than when I started, but I do feel a little wiser and maybe that is the measure of a successful career, to have learnt something about yourself, about human nature and of course about the subject matter of one's area of practice.

The day after I resigned my tenure on the Bench I sat beside the Chief Justice when he was robed and I was not at the opening of Parliament, as I took on the role of Speaker.

Today marking the end of my judicial career, I sit not only next to the Chief Justice in robes, but also next to my now former colleagues Mr Justice Yeats and Mr Justice Restano. I cannot begin to express how very strange it feels to be the odd one out, sitting without my trusted wig and gown, I feel like an impostor and the situation is not helped by the fact that this environment still feels like home to me.

It almost feels as comfortable as sitting on the sofa watching a movie, almost. I consider myself privileged to have been on the Supreme Court Bench for almost fourteen years, not I hesitate to add by way of serving a custodial sentence, but perhaps more aptly carrying out a community service order.

The Chief Justice has been a source of guidance and a support to me from the start. His sound advice and vast experience has been invaluable. He has been the best of colleagues and a good friend. I thank my brother judges for the camaraderie and friendship we have shared. When one works with such a band of brothers, the hard is made less hard and the good times even better.

Most sincere thank you also to the Registrar Mr Karl Tonna, who was never too busy to be of assistance not only to me but to the senior judiciary as a whole.

I thank Sir Maurice Kay and all of the Court of Appeal present and past for their guidance and friendship. I must mention a special thank you to Sir Paul Kennedy, who delighted me when he said that in the nicest possible way he considered me to be “one of the boys”.

I recall serving with Puisne Judges past Christopher Bulter, Barrington Black, Geoffrey Grigson and Adrian Jack. I share fond memories of my time with them. We helped each other over legal hurdles and helped each other celebrate the conclusions of trials and hearings with less complex tipple.

I thank the Supreme Court's brilliant CEO, Ms Cumbo who runs the engine room with the precision of a mechanical engineer. I thank the secretaries, the clerks, the listing clerk, the ushers and bailiffs with whom I worked on a daily basis and all of the back office staff without whom this institution would grind to a halt.

And I thank the Bar for the help and the courtesy you have afforded me, it has been a pleasure to work with you all. Those of you who appeared more regularly before me, I have got to know a little better and I appreciate your work and your dedication.

I consider myself fortunate to have been able to choose the moment in time when I step down from the Bench and to have done so when I still feel young and with energised capacity to learn along a different path. I am blessed to share this moment of departure with my wonderful fiancé Ian who understands the workings of my sometimes-unpredictable mind, my lovely mother, my family who have been staunch in their support of me and my closest circle of friends who have always had my back.

It is with profound sadness, but with even greater gratitude, that I say goodbye to the Supreme Court, it's Judges, it's CEO, it's staff and its users. And so, with the leave of the Chief Justice I will, if I may, adjourn these proceedings and retire myself. Thank you.