

Freetown City Council (FCC) impregnates the Fast Track Commercial Court (FTCC) with sewage and garbage

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You think this is sensationalised caption? That is because you have not been an embarrassed witness to the gushing sewage in and outside the compound housing the Fast Track Commercial Court (FTCC). Or just maybe you have never seen the mountains of garbage which abut the perimeter fence of the court. Thank your lucky stars! Your nostrils have not been violated by the stench or your eyes, insulted by the huge piles of every tribe of filth. When you do, you would in rage, conclude I am in fact being lenient with description. I am reliably told by senior staff of the Fast Track Commercial Court (FTCC) that it is the Freetown City Council (FCC) that has indiscriminately let loose its bowels. And so, poor FTCC is at the receiving end of every constituent of its fecal matter. For several months, if not for over a year now, the sanctity of the court and its environs, has come under nauseating pollutant attack from either the direct cause of the FCC's palpably broken sewage system or omission of its municipal duties in attending to the concomitant hazards. Ironically, this is the very institution which is in charge of cleaning the city. Well is it a case of—*when the preacher becomes a sinner*? So maybe, well just maybe, the FCC should first clean itself, make sure its neighbours are not drowned in the seepage of its filth and sewage, before it attempts to extend tentacles beyond. The old adage, charity begins at home cannot be more apt. I am aware that this is an inherited crisis. But good leadership does not excuse itself from the problems of its forebears. It takes full responsibility for them in the continuing circumstances and address them without apportioning blames to the past. Matter-of-factly, history teaches that good leaders are called upon when society is in dire straits and they are required to hoist the people and positively transform their state of affairs.

The Fast Track Court houses the commercial division of the High Court. It is the place where business people, traders and investors take their disputes to and where they seek the intervention of the courts in their commercial or trade dealings. Our country's economy is in poor health, whether or not this is an inheritance, is a debate for the politicians. And so, more than ever before, the country is in need of commercial and business ventures, corporate investments and multi-national and financial institutions to help government in relieving the stress of our economy. The duty of government (inclusive of all branches) is to create the environment conducive to business interests and a key component of such environment, is the commercial courts. This explains the reason why the commercial division of the High Court has speedier and less adversarial means of settlements of claims and disputes (well, at least in the books!). And so, it is

intended that an investor, entrepreneur or a businessman or trader should leave the FTCC impressed with organisation, speed, cleanliness and ultimately and more importantly, justice. *I have said this oftentimes and at the risk of repeating myself, let me say again that the FTCC should not only exist to foster, protect and settle commercial interests and/or claims, it should also be a prototype for the administration of justice in all other divisions of the High Court.*

When the FTCC is assailed by pollutants such as piles of filth and sewage in and around its precincts, its decorum of justice is violated. Many people who have cases in court, especially business people are sometimes in as much distress as, anyone labouring under any form of ailment. I think it is grossly unfair and a violation of their right to health and wellbeing to subject their mental anguish to such health risks emanating from sewage and towers of rubbish.

The FCC should be at the forefront in protecting the image and sanitation of the courts of justice. The FCC should not be an adversary to the health of the aspiring model of the High Court—the FTCC. It should not otherwise even collaborate, by omission, with the violators of the nobility of the court premises—by not taking swift and decisive action. I think this is a case of utter lack of respect for the courts—the judicial lever of government. Would the FCC subject the house of parliament and its occupants and guests to this perpetual stench as they do the High Court?

Imperatively, the FCC should move speedily to address the unsightly picture at the doorway of commercial justice. This is certainly not a good picture of the commercial courts to our nation's trade development partners both foreign and domestic. Let me also say, that the judiciary must also collaborate with the FCC and prevent future events which add to its litany of challenges in the delivery of justice. I think what such incidents show in reality is that institutions don't get to interface and collaborate on solving common problems or forging solutions to common problems. Some problems only require mutual cooperation by public institutions, which appears to be lacking in our country. The public institutions function like they are on a separate isle from one another. Private citizens walk past and pretend they are anosmic to the pungent smell, even though it forces them to imprison their noses. We are all affected by these ills, yet we pretend as if they don't bother us at all. The other day, a senior lawyer, Mrs. H. I. Ahmed, personally gave some money to the security personnel at the FTCC to wash off some of the sewage which had been nestled on the forecourt of the building. Many of these kinds of acts of patriotism are needed to rebrand, re-fix and reconfigure the lines around a nation once leading exporter of western civilisation, erudition, Christian theologies and social cohesion.

The court is not only a place to seek justice, it is or should also be a refuge for those psychologically troubled. Therefore, litigants should not be made to contend with health hazards in addition to their troubled emotional states of minds. The FCC must therefore own up to the pregnancy and clean its mess in and around the FTCC!