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ACM CALLS FOR GUYANESE INTERVENTION IN ST KITTS WORK PERMIT ISSUE

January 6, 2005 - The Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM) is calling on the Government of Guyana to intervene in what it believes could be an attempt to drive Guyanese journalist, Clive Bacchus, out of St Kitts and Nevis.

Bacchus has worked as a journalist in the CARICOM state since 1998 and currently serves as the General Manager at a privately-owned radio station there. A recent attempt to have his work permit renewed has been blocked by a new requirement that his position be publicly advertised and preference given to a national of St Kitts and Nevis.

However, in a letter dispatched to Guyana's Foreign Minister, Rudy Insanally, on Wednesday January 5, the ACM contends that "this unprecedented challenge to Mr Bacchus' tenure at the station is linked to his performance as an independent journalist."

The organisation also argues that "this situation constitutes a blow to the best intentions of Caribbean Community Member States that have openly declared their support for a Single Market and Economy which specifically, at this stage, pronounces on the ability of both university graduates and media workers to live and work freely in signatory countries."

The letter, copied to CARICOM Secretary-General Edwin Carrington, cites a recent statement by the Prime Minister of St Kitts and Nevis, Dr Denzil Douglas, in which he describes the free movement of skilled CARICOM nationals as "a critical component in regards to the effective working of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy."

"We believe the latest course of events involving Mr Bacchus is grossly inconsistent with the Prime Minister's stated position," the ACM letter says.

The ACM letter follows a statement of protest issued by the Guyana Press Association earlier this week.

ACM President, Wesley Gibbings, said "civil society has a key role to play in ensuring that the commitments of regional governments are followed through to the stage of implementation."

"There have been too many instances in which the words of our politicians have not been accompanied by the corresponding actions," he said. "The ACM is here to ensure that the CARICOM Treaty obligation, which has been designed to facilitate the work of journalists in the region, is neither forgotten nor breached."