



Association of Caribbean Mediaworkers

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ADDRESS BY DALE ENOCH, PRESIDENT ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN MEDIA WORKERS TO OPENING SESSION OF 15 ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF THE SURINAMESE UNION OF JOURNALISTS - FEBRUARY 6, 2006

Vice President of the Republic of Suriname, Mr. Ram Sardjoe, President of the Suriname Union of Journalists, Rachael Lobo-Van Der Kooye Executive members of the union, Mr. Michael Williams, Chairman of the Media Complaints Council of Trinidad and Tobago, colleagues.

I bring you greetings from the executive and entire membership of the Association of Caribbean MediaWorkers. Former president of the association, now General Secretary Wesley Gibbings sends his regret at

not being here, but sends his warmest congratulations to all of you. I also wish to congratulate you on putting together this very worthwhile and absolutely necessary symposium.

I congratulate you as well on your anniversary. Such an anniversary must be recognised. Media associations throughout the region are known for longevity....they rack up many years of existence but few of them really achieve objectives.

Many of our media associations have bumpy rides along the way. Some survive only in name, while others have agendas which do not always redound to the benefit of the profession.

Your organization has suffered some of the pains, went to sleep for a few years and now I am very pleased to see that it has been revived and continues to build. I am told new journalists have joined and I do hope this growth continues. The SUJ should be seen as an example to other media organizations which have been going through some turmoil over the years.

The ACM has taken note of some which are in trouble. Where ever possible we have tried and will continue to make interventions.

I have been in office for just about three months and one of the things that I have had to do is to take a tally of the media organizations which are seeing some difficult times. While the ACM comprises representative bodies from every Caricom country, a few of them are not active at all, and some are struggling along.

In the coming months we are going to see what possible inputs we can make in giving the boost necessary. A lot of the problems with the media associations and unions are very common.



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Many of them grind to a halt because of a lack of participation on the part of individuals. People in the profession are not doing enough to keep their organizations alive and healthy.

We must all recognise that a healthy and vibrant journalists association makes for a strong and effective democracy. Working and functioning associations help the profession. Journalists must become more active in their national associations.

Strong associations keep the ACM strong. We can only seek to meet our objectives when we have associations like yours working in their respective territories.

But it is not all bad at all. We have been forced to sit up and take notice of great strides being made by associations in countries of the region like, Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Antigua-Barbuda, Guyana and indeed Suriname.

Challenges of survival faced by some journalists associations must be conquered if we are to address some of the hard struggles those in the profession face on a daily basis in some parts.

Almost every day, in some parts of the region, journalists are meeting stumbling blocks. Some of those obstacles are self erected and many are the result of paranoid, over-zealous, insecure and often weak governments.

Media house owners are also responsible for some of the challenges. Many of them are pandering to government's implementation of new oppressive pieces of legislation and laws. They do not recognise that a fettered media does not make an empowered population.

There are pending laws in some countries of the region, like Dominica and Trinidad and Tobago which can pose serious problems. There are those who at every turn try to put in place laws which would affect the work of the media.

Access to information continues to be a problem, although many countries are boasting of having Freedom of Information Laws. There are constant infringements of these laws. Governments are moving the bar too often. More and more there are new categories of exemptions being introduced and the ones which remain are getting more and more difficult to access.

We as media must monitor this and when there are blatant and even quiet infringements, they must be questioned and reported on. The public domain is where we must often take our fight and concerns. We have the tools to do it.



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Another challenge which is becoming more and more prevalent are court rulings. You are not alone in your struggles with the courts. In Trinidad and Tobago we have also been dealing with decisions from the judiciary which make us frown.

The way the media interact with the courts must be looked at carefully by both sides.

I am very pleased to see the agenda for this symposium. The issue of training is being addressed and this is good. Too many of our journalists, particularly where there is significant media expansion are not aware of the basics, the ethics of the profession. They must be taught and guided. That is partly the responsibility of organizations like yours. The ACM is doing its part too. I am told unprofessional conduct is one of the greatest threats to journalism here....I want to tell you, it is the same in other parts too. We are shooting ourselves in the foot when we do not adhere to standards. There is too much sloppiness. We have to combat that. This is one of the challenges of the profession in the region.

I look forward to participating in some of your sessions and to a large extent it is my intention to observe. I believe there is a lot to learn here.

Again, congratulations to you and thank you for your hospitality.

The ACM is here and together with your executive we will strive to improve the standards.

Several training programmes are being organized as we speak and the S.U.J. will be a part of this. You have a member on the ACM executive now in the person of Nita Ramcharan, who I see here this morning.

Her inclusion can only be to the benefit of the profession here.

I thank you and wish you every success.