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JOURNALIST BRIEFLY DETAINED ON CRIMINAL LIBEL INVESTIGATIONS

TUESDAY, March 14 - Grenada police Tuesday briefly detained the editor of a weekly newspaper here as part of investigations into a criminal libel matter, but his lawyers said the attempt was aimed at muzzling free expression and the press on the island.

Police confirmed that George Worme, editor of the Grenada Today newspaper, had been detained in connection with an article published in the February 17 issue of his newspaper.

"I am really sorry that the police are being used," Worme told reporters as he emerged from the police station flanked by his lawyers.

Attorney Anslem Clouden told reporters that there was nothing libellous about the article and that the "public will no doubt ascertain that in due course."

He said the detention of Worme, a strong critic of the Keith Mitchell administration, was an attempt to "muzzle free speech and expression".

"This is an all out attack on free speech, the right of the press in a democratic society to disseminate information" he said calling on international organisations like the United Nations Human Rights Commission to mount a mission to the island to investigate the matter.

Clouden said that the matter is "somewhat intricately bound" to the Peter David affair, a reference to the attempt by the government to remove an opposition legislator from Parliament on the grounds that he holds Canadian citizenship and was not entitled to contest the November 2003 general elections.

David won the Town of St. George constituency in the last election defeating the incumbent Tourism Minister Brenda Hood of the governing New National Party (NNP).

President of the Grenada Bar Association (GBA), Ruggles Ferguson, said that the police had indicated that Worme had been detained as part of their investigations of a report made to them on the issue.

"This is clearly an attack on freedom of the press because here you have an allegation of criminal libel and you see the involvement of the police," he said.

Ferguson said that while other democratic societies were seeking to become more transparent in their dealings, criminal libel remains on the "books in Grenada" even though an aggrieved person may have "other resorts in the civil courts".



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"What that is intended to do is to stifle criticism and people would become fearful of what they say and would rather not say it for fear of ending up before the police," he told reporters.