



Association of Caribbean Mediaworkers

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THE MEDIA, DEMOCRACY AND ELECTIONS

Georgetown Club, August 17, 2006

**STATEMENT BY WESLEY GIBBINGS,
GENERAL-SECRETARY,
ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN MEDIAWORKERS**

I bring greetings to the Guyanese media community from the 200-plus Caribbean journalists - some of them representing media associations - who are members of the ACM community.

From Belize to The Bahamas to Suriname to Guyana, the Association of Caribbean MediaWorkers has over the past five years excited the imaginations of media people with an interest in ensuring that the environment in which they operate is both free and conducive to the promotion of high professional values.

Guyana has a special place in our collective hearts, mine in particular, since it was from here the Caribbean has been provided with some of our finest media practitioners. We think of Fr. Andrew Morrison, Hubert Williams, Rickey Singh, Ric Mentus, Sandra Baptiste and Hugh Hamilton. There are always dangers in providing such a listing so I know there are many more names on your lips at this very moment – and some who would have preferred that I had not gone there at all.

But, during my time here 10 years ago, I was able to meet the late Patrick Denny and I came to know, even better, people like Cecil Griffith and Orin Gordon among others.

Guyana is also special because its media development has followed a rather unique path in the Caribbean context. Where now, the challenge of radio formats accompanies rapid growth in the broadcasting industry in Trinidad, Jamaica and most of the Eastern Caribbean; in Guyana that challenge resides in the arena of television. A situation that has prevailed for at least the past 10 years.

In Guyana, there is also the experience of a longstanding state-run newspaper and a tradition of print media that is unparalleled in most other countries within CARICOM. Some say it is a dying art, but people here read newspapers and take them very seriously. They serve as instruments of validation and have played an important role in defining the social and political agenda, though not necessarily setting it.



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The question today is: what now?

To the extent that it is at all possible to imagine that the design of the wider society is separable from the mechanics of mass media in Guyana, we believe people in the media here have the option of forging a new direction for themselves and, consequently, for the nation. However clumsily we have negotiated the past, we have a chance now to move forward under terms that are of our own design.

The work of the Independent Refereeing Panel has so far been an excellent exercise in promoting the notion of self-regulation and of embracing media audiences as a vital element of the mass communication process.

If we claim to have on our shoulders a shared responsibility for the practice of democracy, we cannot turn our backs on the people for whom all of this is meant. Tuesday's exercise by the Panel was thus a watershed event in media development in this country and the region and is an approach we hope to take to the wider Caribbean.

There is scope though for our own leadership, our own way of proceeding, our own prescriptions, so we also need to listen more attentively to each other, however difficult commercial competition militates against this.

Today's workshop is one among many interventions that have been made and will be made toward this end.

The ACM has been fortunate to be in a position to partner with Angelica Hunt, Dean Graber, the Independent Refereeing Panel in the persons of Lennox Grant and Wyvolyn Gager and our colleagues here in Guyana to stimulate further discussion and debate on the important issue of the Media, Democracy and Elections.

I also wish to announce that we are already in discussions with other international and regional partners to see how best we can work with you during the post-election period.

I am glad that I am a part of today's event and look forward to well-informed frank and open discussions on the issues we have placed on the agenda.