



Association of Caribbean Mediaworkers

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Introductory Remarks by Wesley Gibbings, General Secretary, Association of Caribbean MediaWorkers; Forum For Media Development – Latin America and the Caribbean, Cartagena, Colombia – September 21-22, 2006

The Association of Caribbean Media Workers is an organisation of Caribbean journalists and other media operatives interested in the professional development of media practitioners, promotion of the free press and the fostering of strong intra-regional collaboration on issues related to the promotion of free expression.

We were established in 2001 and currently comprise a network of over 200 journalists and media organisations in 19 sovereign predominantly English-speaking Caribbean countries but including a nominal presence in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Martinique and Guadeloupe. There is also support for the ACM through Caribbean nationals resident in the United States and the United Kingdom.

While we understand the confusion often generated by definitions of what precisely constitutes the Caribbean, we are committed to a version which embraces the member countries of the Association of Caribbean States – all countries washed by the Caribbean Sea.

Therefore, by the time we achieve our objective of fully meeting our mandate of pan-Caribbean involvement, most of you may feel obliged to join our organisation as we dine at a single Caribbean table.

It is however abundantly evident that the barriers of language, legal systems and size often stand in the way of the common ground we seek. These, I suggest, are more perceived than real obstacles to what is actually a joint destiny and a past with similarities we often do not recognise.

In the English-speaking Caribbean there are traditions of democracy and freedom that run through our veins, in our hearts and across the waters that join not separate us. Almost 200 years ago, Simon Bolivar sat at a desk in the island of Jamaica and wrote that “We have but to look around us on this hemisphere to witness a simultaneous struggle at every point.”

This is also today’s reality. Whether we speak of proposed constitutional amendments in Trinidad and Tobago to erase the explicit guarantee of a free press, or we discuss the invoking of the 100 year old Ley De Imprenta in Costa Rica we stand on common ground, we bear witness to a simultaneous struggle to be free.

In the ACM, our platform for intervention on these issues rests heavily on an ability to define common ground. Our campaign to restore state advertising to a



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newspaper in the Cayman Islands was waged from Port of Spain, Trinidad; the threatened expulsion of a Guyanese journalist resident in St Kitts was withdrawn after we met in Georgetown, and the heartbreak of Haiti resonates in every capital of the Caribbean Community of which it is a member.

Over the past five years, the ACM has deepened its presence in those countries with which we have been most familiar, but also made concerted strides in widening the scope of our vision. In the process, we have forged important alliances in St Maarten, Martinique and Guadeloupe and through friends like Rosental Alves of the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas and Jaime Abello of FNPI we have accessed skills and resources further afield.

With a budget that resides perilously close the zero marker, we have been able to produce two impressive publications. One on the reporting of Climate Change issues and the other entitled “The Looming Storm” which reports on the state of the media in the English-speaking Caribbean.

We have also initiated training programmes on issues ranging from Education, Population and Development, Health, the Environment and a range of subjects we have defined as “survival issues” – those challenges of the Caribbean that have implications for our very survival as a people.

In this, we have embraced a notion of journalism for change. A journalism based on the assumption that people armed with knowledge under conditions that are free are more likely than not to make decisions on their own behalf that secure their future within a framework of democracy and freedom.

Our presence at the Global Forum for Media Development in Jordan last October, the precursor to this event in Cartagena, assisted in re-assuring us in the Caribbean that we were not alone in such matters. I thank, personally, Luis Botello and Jaime Abello for their belief in our common destiny as a Latin American and Caribbean region and their work in ensuring a Caribbean presence there.

I thank for your patience with my poor Spanish and assure you always of the support and camaraderie of your Caribbean friends and family.