



# Association of Caribbean Mediaworkers

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## **STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN MEDIA WORKERS (ACM), WESLEY GIBBINGS, ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY**

GEORGETOWN, Guyana, May 2, 2008 - Observance of World Press Freedom Day 2008 establishes the critical link between the untrammelled ability of people to express themselves and to freely access official information, and their empowerment as citizens.

Some of us correspondingly contend that a principal measure of the power of the people is the extent to which the flow of information, news, opinion and analysis is facilitated by an environment that enables free expression and access to information.

The Caribbean region is, through this injunction, challenged by socio-political antecedents to contemplate a process which would have the impact of effectively transferring responsibility for the future from the grasp of a few to the hands of the people.

It is also a time when crime and violence, economic instability, natural disasters, political conflict and changing global circumstances presage continued uncertainty. The urgency to find solutions and to mitigate impacts is apparent, often in unbridled fashion.

The practice of journalism is unique as a professional function reliant on the view that more, not less, free expression and openness is desirable as a pre-condition for social progress, transparency and participatory democracy. This uniqueness is characterised by the manner in which the media serve as a bridge between civil society and the state.

The ACM also concurs with the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, that press freedom and freedom of information, are “the founding principles for good governance, development and peace.”

It is true that professional imperfections militate against achievement of the broader social goals but a penalty of silence is unacceptable as a form of redress against perceived harm.

For reasons such as this, the ACM stands alert to interventions that have the impact of restricting, rather than facilitating free expression. Acts of official censorship, prior restraint and self-censorship in the media are condemned as inimical to the broader cause of progress and growth.



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The absence of effective Access to Information laws in some jurisdictions also pronounces unfavourably on the degree to which people are empowered to impact on the decision-making process in a way that affects their everyday lives.

Official regulations that seek to bring order to chaotic telecommunications environments are best advised by the view that content restrictions, beyond widely-accepted rules that protect a person's privacy and character and the security of the state, are not supported by the principles of free expression, as defined by Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, among other hemispheric and international instruments.

The ACM is committed to raising awareness among media professionals on the value of press freedom as a function of freedom of expression with all its attendant benefits to humanity.

We believe professional standards should rise to meet the requirements of such freedom and that a concerted effort to network Caribbean media professionals, improve standards, instil high ethical standards and to insist on adherence to the principle of press freedom is the responsibility of an organisation such as ours.

On World Press Freedom Day 2008, we re-dedicate ourselves to the task of shaping our profession in a manner that best serves the interests of a region in social and economic transition, challenged by changing global circumstances, impaired by a colonial legacy but committed to building a better future.