



Association of Caribbean Mediaworkers

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STATEMENT BY THE GUYANA PRESS ASSOCIATION ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

GEORGETOWN, Guyana - On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2008, the Guyana Press Association (GPA) salutes all media workers in Guyana and pays tribute to those who died while performing their sacred role of presenting the truth.

Colleagues, we celebrate another World Press Freedom Day this year at a time when machinations are afoot to entrench division among the local media corps.

Media managers and media workers need to take advantage of training opportunities to arrest declined standards in both the broadcast and print media.

World Press Freedom Day also is being observed across the globe at a time when Guyana's political directorate continues to leverage influence in what some of our colleagues print and broadcast. This situation has undoubtedly seriously compromised the media in Guyana and has affected our role as the 'watch dog' of society.

While the GPA recognizes that we are not all working for the same media entities, it is our firm belief that we must all abide by the sacred principles of journalism. Equally, media workers must guard against private interests that seek to similarly engage in media manipulation to avoid the publicity of certain issues about themselves or their opponents or competitors.

Further, this day should also cause us to do some serious self-examination both as a fraternity and as individual journalists. Of particular concern to the GPA is the number of training programmes we have organized during the past months with less than satisfactory responses especially from the younger journalists. At the same time, we continue to receive negative reviews for our work, which points to the need for for training.

Moreover, on this occasion of World Press Freedom Day, it is critical that the media fraternity in Guyana and the Caribbean Community understands the importance of its role in shaping societal values and safeguarding the public's right to know whilst holding fast to the tenets of the profession. It must be understood that the freedoms - though often threatened - taken for granted in countries such as ours are still non-existent in some jurisdictions.

We, therefore, stand with our colleagues around the world in particular those in the continent of Africa and in the Middle East who have had to endure difficult times practicing their craft. On this occasion we also take the opportunity to urge President Bharrat Jagdeo to relinquish the position of Information Minister



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because of the apparent constitutional complications associated with litigation against the President.

In this context, we call for a bilateral settlement of the CNS TV 6 issue only for an independent arbiter to re-examine the dispute into the closure of that television station and make a decision that is final and binding on both sides. We, however, urge CNS-TV 6 to pursue that aspect of the litigation dealing with matters against the President all the way to the Caribbean Court of Justice.

We note that the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Mr. Ambeyi Ligabo has listed the closure of CNS-TV 6 and the withdrawal of advertising among its international concerns. Mr. Ligabo said: "These explicit censorship measures now exist alongside more subtle tactics that severely restrict the independence of the press whilst seemingly allowing States to maintain a façade of respect to democratic principles such as freedom of expression. In this regard, Governments have exerted severe economic pressure, including through selective use of State advertisement, aiming to strangle independent media outlets.

They have also exploited subjective regulations such as licensing to suspend or shut down the broadcast or print media. Libel lawsuits have similarly been used deliberately as a means to imprison critical journalists or to punish them with disproportionate fines. Examples of these measures abound.

In Guyana, for instance, CNS Channel 6 was suspended for four months for "infringing the terms of its license after an interviewee, speaking during a live broadcast, called for attacks against the President"

As we celebrate this day it is the wish of the GPA that the occasion would be used to review our own work, while at the same time find innovative ways of empowering this organization so that it can be the vanguard against political and other interference, which reduce our role from being journalists to mere Public Relations agents

It is only the elevation of these and other sacred journalistic values that the media can play a very meaningful and lasting role in the empowerment of the masses.