



# Association of Caribbean Mediaworkers

Unit 1, Upper Level, Elan Place, 137 Eastern Main Rd,

St. Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago

T: 1 (868) 296-8009

E: [acmmail@gmail.com](mailto:acmmail@gmail.com)

W: [www.acmediaworkers.com](http://www.acmediaworkers.com)

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**Address by Prime Minister and Minister of Information Hon. Tillman Thomas to the Third Annual Awards Ceremony of the Media Workers Association of Grenada at the Grenadian by Rex Resort on 28 December, 2008.**

## Salutations

In the spirit of the season, I wish to begin by extending greetings to you all. It is really a pleasure to address you this evening, and I wish to thank your President and his executive for inviting me to this ceremony. I welcome this opportunity as I feel that I am among friends given our good relationship over the years. I also want to congratulate your organization on your continued growth and development over the years. I am aware that it has been challenging, but you have persevered. In doing so, you have achieved many milestones and surmounted many hurdles.

Ladies and gentlemen, most of you are aware of my government's view regarding the media and the important role it must play in the deepening of our democratic process. In fact if you followed my history, you would clearly appreciate my conviction that a free and unbridled media is a critical pillar in the efficient functioning of the democratic process that we practice today. It is because of my conviction that I spent almost three years in prison. In the process that conviction was further entrenched.

It also should be noted that the period of the previous NDC administration was seen in many circles in Grenada and the region as one of the most facilitating period for the media and its operations in Grenada.

The democratic system of governance that we practice today, if it is to be effective, requires that the views of the governed, the opposition and all other stake holders be heard and considered. Your role in facilitating this, is absolutely critical.

My administration views the media as an integral part of the democratic decision making process. Essentially, I view your role as two fold.

You offer the policy makers an opportunity and a medium to communicate policy matters and information to the populace, while at the same time you provide an avenue for important public feedback and constructive criticism. This role places you at the center of the governance process.

I have for many years placed great emphasis on respect for and the protection of our institutions. The media is one such institution, and your role is critical in maintenance of our democratic system.



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Ladies and gentlemen my administration is committed to govern our country within the rule of law. As part of our legislative agenda, we are putting in place the necessary structures and resources to deepen the democratic governance process.

In this regard we are moving to implement the Integrity legislation passed in Parliament close to one year ago and to appoint the Ombudsman to look into complaints from the public. Additionally, we plan to introduce The Freedom of Information Act shortly. This Act will hopefully enhance your access to government information and ultimately your work.

It is my view that the media has made considerable strides in Grenada during the last decade. Grenadians now have a greater choice in accessing information and entertainment. To some extent, there is some level of freedom of expression if one gauges the various talk shows that abound. While this can be regarded as some progress, you know only too well, of the many threats and legal actions that you have been subjected to in the past few years.

This scenario has given rise to many concerns. For example, some are questioning whether our society is better served given the recent increase in the number of media houses.

Is the impact of these stations positively influencing the appropriate development of our society? Are these media channels facilitating the acceleration of foreign cultural penetration? Are the media houses really contributing significantly to our overall development process? These are all pertinent question that as a people we have to ponder.

Many also make reference to the choice of programs and the type of music played frequently. They question its impact on our societal norms, our customs and our practices. Currently the issue of the local "Parang" is generating some national attention.

Importantly, we also need to ask, who really makes the decisions to do what and when within the media.

I quite often listen for example to some of our local artistes and media personalities. Based on their programming, diction, style and intonation, I sometimes wonder about whether they are of Grenadian descent and whether they fully appreciate their roles and its impact. I am concerned for example, about the influence on our young people and the extent to which they are well grounded in good old Grenadian values.

I think what all this clearly points to ladies and gentlemen, is the need for policy intervention and concerted action at this time in our history. There is a need for a



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national media policy and a code of ethics to guide and inform media practice in Grenada. This needs to be revisited promptly. There is also a need to accelerate training for all media personnel.

Most importantly, is the need to ensure that all media practitioners are grounded in our history, our culture, and that they have an appreciation of our national vision, our goals and our objectives for the growth and development of our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the decade of the 2000's is significantly different from the late 80's and 90's. There has been major shifts in the social, political and economic frontiers. Climate change for example now affects all of us particularly small countries. We are not isolated nor insulated from all of these developments.

The impact of political conflicts on the global economy and its resulting effect on our own development is also pertinent. All these are areas that your listeners, readers and viewers should be familiar with and understand. This is where your role assumes greater significance.

The goals and benefits of our regional integration movement should be high on your programming agenda. How can you help Grenadians and our neighbors to understand the importance of this initiative and the implications for us as a Caribbean people?

For example what impact does the initiative of Prime Minister Patrick Manning of Trinidad and Tobago have on our OECS movement? I wish to suggest that these are agenda items that speak to your role as a catalyst for change.

You are mind changers and influencers.

Grenada will be 35 years as a nation in less than two months. What have we achieved so far? What are the challenges that lie ahead?

What are some of the behavioral and other changes that we need to adopt as a people to accelerate our development? I suggest that these are some of the questions that enquiring minds need answers to. It is your role to assist in this process as you pursue your profession.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have the opportunity to once again rebuild our institutions, our people and our country. This requires individual commitment and a collective resolve to move Grenada, the sub region and the wider CARICOM region forward. We must shoulder that task.



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As I end, my expectation of the media is that you practice your profession responsibly and that you seek and report truth always. Along with, civil society, other stakeholders and the people in general you must monitor our performance and be active participants in the democratic process.

I encourage you as journalists to question us as policy makers, our decisions and our proposals. It is through this process, that all ideas contend, that we get the best out of our interactions. This debate and intercourse also allows for an improved quality of decision making. I look forward to a continued excellent relationship with the media and I wish you all a Merry Christmas and the best for 2009.

I thank you