



Association of Caribbean Mediaworkers

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Address delivered by Mr. Rawle Titus, President of the Media Workers of Grenada (MWAG) at its Third Annual Awards at the Grenadian by Rex Resort on Sunday December 28th, 2008.

His Excellency Governor General Carlyle Glean and Mrs. Glean; Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Information Tillman Thomas and Mrs. Thomas; Parliamentary Representative for South St. George Honourable Glynnis Roberts; other government Ministers; Opposition Leader, Dr. Keith Mitchell; representative from the clergy; other specially invited guests; ladies and gentlemen; colleagues; WELCOME.

Let me first take this opportunity to congratulate all the media practitioners who excelled in the year under review and would be awarded tonight.

I wish also to recognise the most recent past President of the Media Workers Association of Grenada, Michael Bascombe, whose dream it was to have a Media Awards – and this year we are hosting the third such ceremony. Michael I know you would have liked to be here but circumstances did not permit. However we thank you for joining us on line and look forward to you being here in person for next year's ceremony.

Tonight ladies and gentlemen, we stare into the twilight of what by all standards has been an extremely challenging year, on many fronts for us.

Tonight we proudly celebrate our successes, revel in our accomplishments, recognize the strides we have made and cement our bonds of unity as media workers, as we envisage the years ahead.

But tonight, we must also echo and welcome clarion calls for urgent rescue initiatives to combat rapidly declining standards in our profession and construct a climate that sets parameters of values, under which we must not sink.

2008 was to some extent a defining year for the media in Grenada.

It was a year in which fortitude was tested, courage was demonstrated and respect was won.

Media workers in the frontlines and the trenches went above and beyond to be fair, accurate and balanced, even in the face of one disgruntled politician, obsessed with a campaign spanning more than a decade, aimed at convincing vulnerable sections of our society, that the media was being unfair to him.



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This was a hectic year of back to back issues, from the circumstances surrounding the collapse of an indigenous bank, to the fall-out created by a police spy scandal, to heated and high stakes general elections.

Fear less and persistent, our media, in the public's interest, probed, challenged, analyzed and made every effort to be fair, accurate and balanced, from Sunday's with George Grant, You Decide on channel six, Beyond the Headlines on GBN and all of the various current affairs programmes and news coverage including the provocative Anthony "Jericho" Greenidge on WEE FM.

This was a year when the Media Workers Association, was forced to advocate, intensely, in the interest of the profession as is our role and responsibility. We did this in the face of repeated and unfair political attacks, most of which you are well familiar with.

The Association had to serve as a barometer that measured a society's regression, when segments of that society succumbed to a bullying of their interpretation by a public official's negative campaign against a still vulnerable media; a public official who has achieved so much intellectually and who has contributed so much to nation building.

When did it become unfair, particularly in an emerging democracy, for reporters to question public officials on issues of national interest, their conduct here and abroad as well as on matters that have constitutional implications?

Freedom of the press in Grenada, was being threatened by one politician who could not have his way with some of us and who refused to accept our role to ask the tough questions, and report without fear or favour and in the public's interest. Our duty is to be responsible in being fair, accurate and balance.

In the year under review, reporters on assignments were verbally abused, physically abused, were the victims of a poster campaign funded by tax payer's money and state resources as a project inspired by the negative and irresponsible comments of a politician, who, more than ten years ago publicly signed a hemispheric Chapultepec Accord guaranteeing Press Freedom.

Indeed 2008 has been an agonising year for media practitioners in Grenada. As an Association we have had to raise our voices for the press freedom which at times we have taken for granted.

We won a major victory when our advocacy, combined with that of the Paris based media advocacy organization, Reporters Without Borders, pressured the previous administration into reversing an earlier decision to deport Jamaican journalist Tenesha Thomas on grounds, not adequately defined.



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Media workers in Grenada this year emerged from a period where overwhelming evidence has shown that within the past ten years, one politician or the head of an administration may have qualified for entry into the Guinness Book of World Records, being responsible for the largest number of lawsuits against journalists.

Public officials in particular must not simply pay lip service to Press Freedom and provide predictable rhetoric but must demonstrate their support by actions.

But while we clamour for respect and freedom to practice this noble profession we must not forget that with great freedom comes great responsibility.

Turning a deaf ear and a blind eye to the growing consensus of public opinion lamenting declining standards in the media would, be irresponsible.

Lower media standards compromise and have adverse implications for how information is configured and consumed.

This is why we as media practitioners cannot take for granted, the need to be responsible, fair, accurate and balance.

MWAG would like to issue a strong call to media managers to make a serious attempt to invest in the education and training of their employees.

The Association from time to time organizes sensitization workshops with various institutions from the police to the Department of Public Prosecution and protocol, as well as some practical workshops.

But clearly, we lack the resources to address the level and consistency of training required.

Media houses need to invest in ongoing in-house training as well as utilize the services of the Jamaica based Caribbean Institute of Mass Communications, at the University of the West Indies, or other reputable training houses.

We would like to appeal to the Government to provide dedicated scholarships for media workers so that they can pursue degree programmes in foreign universities.

Having better trained media practitioners impact positively on production levels, the integrity of the production as well as the bottom.

It also can have implications for independence, and adds to the strength of a media fraternity that exists as part of a constitution of checks and balances for a society and its guardians of public officials.



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Here, we will like to call on the new administration to state its intention regarding the media policy initiative. If we are to subscribe to the principle that government is continuous then the next move has to be made by the government.

It was just last year that we met with the Committee and agreed on amendments to the policy which was supposed to have gone through cabinet and parliament for review.

Our recommendations then included the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act. We maintain our position that the concept be made law.

Additionally, in the interest of Press Freedom, we restate our appeal for a repealing of the Sedition Act.

Ladies and gentlemen, while there is much to be said, there is also much to be done.

We have to get on with the task of raising the bar.

From the earlier standards set by William Garraway Donovan, Theophilus Albert Marryshow, Leslie "Horsemouth" Seon, Thelma "TC" Campbell, Hermoine Charles, Uncle Jerry Romain, Sir Alister Hughes...

To the likes of the more modern day media icons, such as Cousin Lou Smith, Harold Pysadee, Lincoln "Toro" Depradine, Rae Roberts, Josephine Mc Guire, Hamlet Mark, Paul Roberts and George Grant....we must find ways of raising the bar....

The history of the media in the Caribbean and in Grenada in particular, is peppered with conflict and controversy.

In the 1970's private newspaper owners were primary targets for lawsuits by the then Prime Minister Sir Eric Matthew Gairy. One newspaper editor was slapped with four libel suits within two years.

Kenrick Radix was beaten and shot as he attempted to photograph a near riotous confrontation between police and newspaper vendors.

And though the Media Workers Association of Free Grenada was formed under the auspices of revolutionary leader Maurice Bishop, clashes between government and media continued.

In one of many examples, Editor of the Grenadian Voice, Leslie Pierre, along with some of his associates, including the now deceased Sir Alister Hughes and



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our current Prime Minister Tillman Thomas, were imprisoned, all because of their determination to maintain Press Freedom.

Colleagues, many battles were fought to get us to where we are today; to a position where private investors, both local and regional, can own and independently operate media houses in this tri-island state.

Let us not let their blood, sweat and tears go in vain. Let us rise to the challenge, maintain the fight for press freedom; after all we are the fourth arm of good governance.

Colleagues let us, with out fear of intimidation, continue to strive for excellence; continue to ask the tough questions.

Let us not neglect our responsibility to inform and educate in a professional and timely manner. Let us take our work seriously – what we do and say shape society's opinions.

In the interest of all, we must insist on working together to ensure relevant measures are put in place to allow for that bar, which was set by our predecessors, to be raised.

Thank you.