



Association of Caribbean Mediaworkers

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GUYANA PRESS ASSOCIATION'S STATEMENT ON WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY, 2009

Guyanese media workers join the rest of the world in observing World Press Freedom Day 2009 whose focus this year is on the media's potential to foster dialogue, reconciliation and mutual understanding.

For us, this focus is apt, particularly given the multicultural fabric of our beloved country which continues to be integrated with the rest of the Caribbean and South America through the Caribbean Community (Caricom) and the various South American and Latin American organisations.

An analysis of these integration processes will most likely provide us with lessons that Guyanese at all strata can learn from, particularly as it relates to press freedom and the role of the media in fostering the social, economic and political evolution of societies.

In this context, the Guyana Press Association (GPA) believes that the country's ability to foster dialogue, reconciliation and mutual understanding continues to be at a grave disadvantage due to the failure of the Government of Guyana to liberalise the radio broadcasting spectrum. We had hoped that the Government would have kept its now one-year old promise -- another of several such promises since 1992 -- to grant licenses for private radio stations to begin operation.

With an increasing recognition by the media for self-regulation, this should have provided significant impetus for the authorities to grant such licenses; radio being the most cost-effective, efficient and potent force in assisting the masses in making rational decisions and creating a better atmosphere of cultural, religious and political tolerance while weaving common threads of development.

The GPA cannot help but note the isolation of large segments of our Amerindian brothers and sisters from the Guyanese mass-media due to geographical and other limitations, a situation that can easily be resolved by the granting of private radio licenses.

The time has come for both coast-landers and residents of the remote hinterland locations to be integrated in various national discourses through the mass-media, in particular private radio, on issues such as the environment, climate change in particular, health, education, human rights and governance.

The GPA, however, welcomes the decision by the Government of Guyana to enact Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation. This is certainly a step in the right direction and must be applauded. When enacted, this will be a key tool in not



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only minimizing inaccuracies and rumors but will also ensure that Guyanese make rational decisions based on authentic information and transparency.

Given the constitutional relationship with Freedom of Expression, the GPA sincerely recommends that both the FOI and any Broadcast Bill be subjected to the broadest possible consultations through extra-parliamentary and parliamentary mechanisms so that consensus can be achieved.

In the spirit of reconciliation and mutual understanding, we had hoped that the President of Guyana, Mr Bharrat Jagdeo would have seen the wisdom of lifting the ban on television journalist, Gordon Moseley from the Office of the President and State House.

Based on local and regional advice as well as our own analysis, the GPA maintains that there was no ill-will or ill-intention on the part of Mr.Moseley in defending his coverage of a meeting between the Head of State and Guyanese living in Antigua and Barbuda.

The failure to lift the ban and to resort to rumour-mongering and character assassination of media workers can be viewed as nothing but failed attempts to intimidate journalists who may pose searching questions that decision-makers at the highest level may consider uncomfortable.

To our media colleagues; the GPA's executive calls on you to strive for the highest professional standards at all times. On-the-job experience in an era of sustained hemorrhaging of our skilled, qualified and experienced reporters, journalists, editors and technical personnel cannot be your only hope to remain in the media. Both technical and non-technical workers need to take advantage of workshops and other continuing education opportunities. Those who see the media as a place for glamour, glitz, by-lines, radio and television popularity and receiving inducements for covering stories have no place among us if their ultimate objective is not to contribute to fair and accurate information.

Within the media itself, too, we need to pay greater attention to issues of Occupational Safety and Health to make representation to management and our trade unions. In this context, we should regard the passing of National Communications Network (NCN), Akila Jacobs and injuries to several of her colleagues as a 'wake-up' call to address workplace safety and adequate compensation.