



Association of Caribbean MediaWorkers

Unit 1, Upper Level, Élan Place, 137 Eastern Main Rd,
St. Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago

T: 1 (868) 296-8009

E: acmmail@gmail.com

W: www.acmediaworkers.com

STATEMENT ON MEDIA COUNCIL BILL, 2010 OF BERMUDA

May 26, 2010 - The Association of Caribbean MediaWorkers (ACM) is concerned that the Media Council Bill 2010, introduced for debate in the parliament of Bermuda on May 7, 2010, seeks to impose a regime of prior censorship and direct political, non-editorial control over media conduct and content.

The ACM subscribes to the view that Media Councils that set standards, monitor and advise on the conduct of media are best operationalised through self-regulatory mechanisms introduced by the media industry itself. This is the preferred approach in many modern democracies and has been the case since 1997 in Trinidad and Tobago, where there exists a Media Complaints Council guided by a Code of Media Practice voluntarily subscribed to by the media industry.

In Guyana, there is also a universally-endorsed Code of Conduct for the Media to guide coverage of elections. There are ongoing discussions by the industry there to extend the Code to general media conduct. This is taking place on the basis of voluntary application and in line with the principle of media self-regulation.

In the United Kingdom, the Press Complaints Council operates as an independent self-regulatory body which deals with complaints about the editorial content of print media, including the websites of newspapers and magazines.

The ACM is committed to such approaches. Media self-regulation does not belong to the realm of legislation which can have the effect of criminalising expression and creating avenues for punitive action that have the potential to silence dissenting and disapproving voices.

The thrust of the Media Council Bill 2010 breaches the principle of voluntary media self-regulation and its stated intent poses a clear danger to enjoyment of free expression as elaborated in Article 9 of the constitution of Bermuda and as prescribed in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights.

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