KEYNOTE SPEECH BY

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

AT A

SYMPOSIUM ON *MEDIA, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GLOBAL WELLBEING*
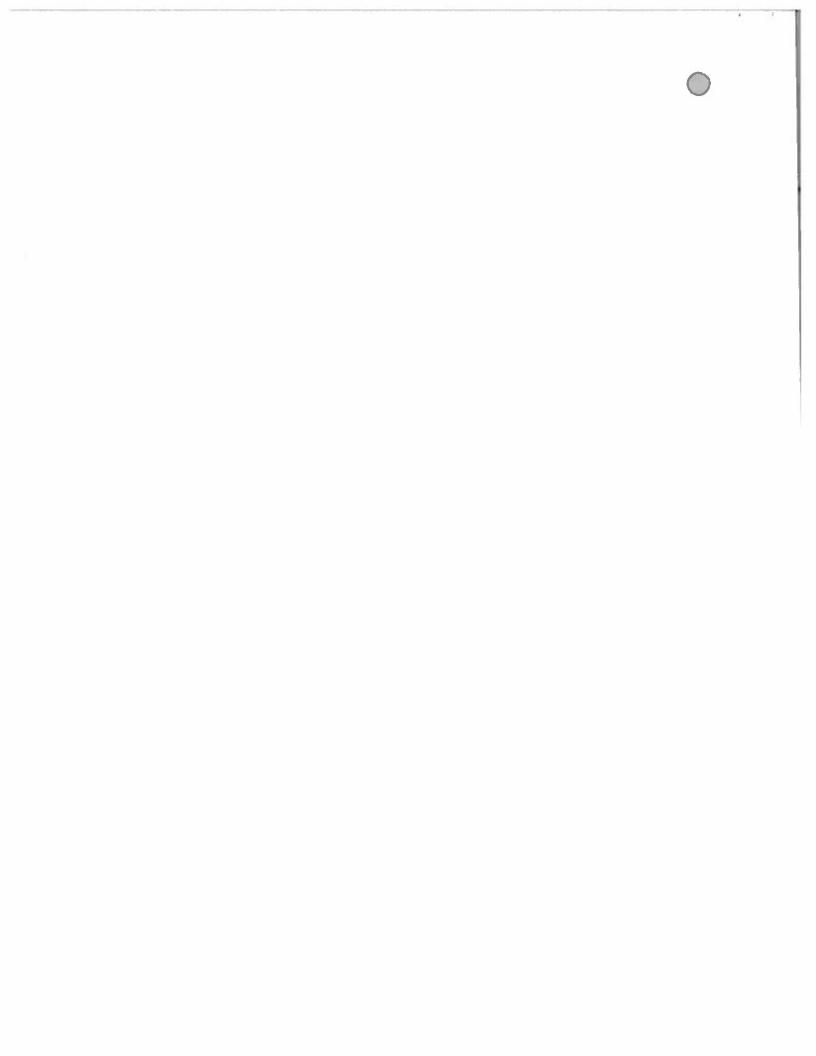
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Madam Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address this symposium on the *Media, Human Rights and Global Wellbeing,* and in so doing, I intend to share with you the Jamaican experience with the use of the media for social change and wellbeing.
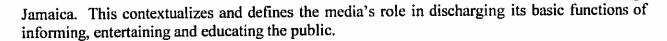
Human Rights

Madam Chair,

It is more than symbolic that this year has been designated the year for human rights learning. It follows closely in the wake of our celebration last year, of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Based on the principles of the UN Charter and the various international instruments and covenants to which Jamaica is a Party, respect for human rights forms a critical element of Jamaica's foreign and domestic policy. Our Constitution, as well as other legislation seeks to protect, promote and preserve human rights. This confirms our faith and commitment to fundamental rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women. Accordingly, Jamaica does not support nor condone human rights abuses wherever they occur.

I highlight Jamaica's commitment to human rights, Madam Chair, in the context of today's discussion on media and human rights, as we refocus our attention on freedom of the press which, all are agreed, is a fundamental human right. Generally speaking, the media strives to be objective despite manipulations from sectional influences to push agendas.

Fortunately, in Jamaica, the media's integrity and sound judgment have remained intact. I am proud to report that the Jamaican media is universally recognized as enjoying high levels of freedom without state control by successive governments or succumbing to sectional interests. But it is state intervention which one naturally contemplates when talk of threat to press freedom is mentioned. A graphic demonstration of the non-visibility of this threat from successive governments in Jamaica can be inferred, for example, in the plethora of television and radio talk show exchanges on a multiplicity of issues dominated by citizens from all levels of society. Daily, "hundreds of unelected prime ministers," or people's advocates emphatically voice their views on myriad issues. Over time, the Government of the day and local authorities do not escape their rigorous examination.

At the same time, it is important to note that the Jamaican media reflects the reality of operating in a developing country. But no matter which country you examine, it is important to note that while observing respect for freedom of expression, there is always the challenge of balancing that freedom with the need for social responsibility – a need that is recognized by Government, the private sector and other civil society groups, as well as media practitioners themselves in

Jamaica. This contextualizes and defines the media's role in discharging its basic functions of informing, entertaining and educating the public.

Media Trends in Jamaica

Madam Chair,

Allow me to generally refer to some current media trends in Jamaica. There has been a significant transformation of the media landscape in Jamaica within the past decade; an increase in the number of free to air television stations to three, an explosion in the number of radio stations to 20 including a number of niche and community radio stations. With the new licensing regime for cable television, this sector has seen significant growth and in more recent times some amount of consolidation. The number of subscriber/cable TV providers in Jamaica in 2008 was 41 companies, with a projected contraction as market forces contribute to further consolidation and larger islandwide operating groups emerge. The percentage of the population per 100 persons who have access to the Internet grew from 11.25 in 2003 to 20.2 in 2007.

With the growth in traditional media and also in ICT in general, the local media sector has also witnessed a number of mergers and acquisitions, as companies seek to consolidate their investments in the sector.

While developments in Jamaica reflect the broader shifts which have been happening globally, from the traditional media to the new media, it should be noted that the changes being observed locally in terms of new media are not as dynamic as those occurring on a more global level or at least in the developed countries. The rate of adoption of new media could be considered low due to various factors including low internet and broadband penetration and economic constraints to more widespread acquisition. So the development of economically viable new media in Jamaica is still in the embryonic stage.

Use of Media for Social Wellbeing

Against this background, I will now examine some concrete measures that have been implemented in responding to the challenge of balancing freedom of the press with the need for social responsibility. In this context, I will also highlight instances where we have used the media in Jamaica for social wellbeing for positive social change. One of the things I am especially proud of is the fact that many of the initiatives are not Government-led.

- Aside from the citizen's advice columns in the press, and radio and television talk shows which provide a platform for citizens to express concerns about perceived social injustice, government delinquency, or in relation to social amenities; the media in Jamaica has increasingly included educational programme content as part of their daily output. All of these have implications for positive socio-psychological outcomes for the public.

- Jamaica has instituted several initiatives to protect our most vulnerable, children, youth and women, including a Children's Code for Programming and ongoing targeted public

education to address specific areas while highlighting the need to eliminate gender biases in the reporting and coverage of violence by the media.

- The **Children's Code for Programming** is an initiative of the Broadcasting Commission, the regulatory agency for the electronic media. It includes a rating system which applies to violence, sexual portrayal, language and deals with the suitability of the programming for a General audience, for children with Parental Guidance, an adult audience, or not for transmission. The Code stipulates the time of day when problematic material can be transmitted to ensure that this is not done when children can reasonably be expected to be a part of the listening and viewing audience. It established a watershed period on week-days, beginning at 9pm. The Code requires that the Media issue advisories about the nature and amount of problematic material in programming to enable parents and guardians to make informed choices about what they will expose their children to.

- Twenty years ago an initiative, commonly referred to as **Crime Stop**, was launched by private sector interests to offer monetary rewards for information leading to the arrest of persons who had committed murder, and this was later expanded to include other crimes. The Media agreed to carry advertisements, free of charge, in both the print and electronic format in support of the programme. The value of these advertisements is approximately J$64million per year. **Crime Stop**, Ladies and Gentlemen, is no small gesture. It is a real commitment by the Jamaican media fraternity, which today continues to be lauded as a successful collaborative effort between the media, the private sector and the police.

- In the area of electoral reform, the media themselves led the charge. Following the 1993 General Elections, a group of media owners and managers orchestrated a lobby for changes to the electoral system. At the time, the concerns of the group about electoral practices and the state of the electoral system were brought forcefully to the attention of the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and officials of the electoral office. Research was commissioned on electoral systems in other parts of the world and editorials and commentaries were used by the media to press for changes. The Government gave a commitment that comprehensive changes would be made. They were true to that commitment, and today, Jamaica is regarded as having a very modern, trust worthy electoral system which has become a model for free and fair elections across the globe.

In keeping with our international obligations in respect of the Platform for Action and Beijing Declaration at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, Jamaica has pursued a number of initiatives in tandem with the resulting strategic objectives to address issues involving violence against women. Noting the impact of the Media on society, Jamaica recently responded to these objectives during a 3-day Regional Training Workshop on Gender and Media Advocacy. A major outcome of the workshop was the development of a Caribbean Action Plan for Gender and Media Advocacy. The Plan, which is a follow-up to the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), included six (6) projects:

1. **Gender Awareness Workshop for Media** – sensitized the media to the importance of including a gender perspective or analysis in news coverage and encouraged the media to use gender sensitive language to minimize gender stereotyping
2. **Civil Society Media and Gender Awareness Project** – project focused on youth groups and hoped to increase awareness as it related to the changing cultural values and norms as they relate to gender in the media and to train peer educators who continued awareness sessions in other communities.
3. **Regional GMMP Training of Trainers** – educated persons participating in the next round of GMMP monitoring by drawing on the expertise of past participants to develop a cadre of persons able to produce regional statistics on gender issues
4. **Research into Codes of Practice, Codes of Conduct, Style Books And Code of Ethics** – developed a standard code of ethics for media practitioners on the national and regional level
5. **Gender Intervention in all communication courses for Community College** – sensitized journalists to gender and media issues during training at the community college level
6. **Regional Directory of female Experts and Spokespersons** – Project provided a database of female experts and spokespersons that will be able to give expert analysis and interviews to the media.

I am happy to report that Jamaica has already initiated or is undertaking ongoing work on most of the aforementioned projects.

Madam Chair,

So far, I have been referring to initiatives involving mainstream private media. It would be remiss of me not to mention, even in passing, the important work done by the public media. The Jamaica Information Service (JIS) is the vanguard of promoting positive educational and motivational programming across a wide spectrum of community interests and special sector groupings. The JIS provides, for example, radio and television programmes for farmers, small businesses, the educational sector, and sporting fraternities. Importantly, the JIS plays a significant role in positive campaigns (both reactive and proactive) which impact on the public, for example, with health issues.

In the interest of time I will mention only two examples. The first relates to a recent outbreak of malaria in Jamaica. Happily, Jamaica is malaria-free today. However, an aggressive campaign by the health authorities was coupled with a media campaign primarily run by the JIS. Tips on symptoms which should cause individuals to go to the hospital; what to do if you caught the disease; how to prevent homes from mosquito infestation; proved invaluable to members of the general public at a time of crisis. The second example is based on the reality of Jamaica's geographic location in a Hurricane belt and the consequent, devastating effects we suffer each year. The public media regularly provides information on what to do in the pre and post hurricane scenario, which is of tremendous benefit to the population.

Recently the reach of the public media has broadened with the birth of the Public Broadcasting Corporation of Jamaica, a government owned television entity which focuses on educational issues of public concern as well as public policy impacting on the country's development. This new medium has further diversified media content with even more attention being paid to broad areas affecting people's welfare and development.

Successive governments have been promoting various measures to improve access to government. Allied to this is the **Access to Information Act** which allows members of the public and the media to gain access to government information on a range of issues. This legislative provision ensures that Government departments and agencies have to provide the media with information on request. In addition, the present Prime Minister has instituted a monthly call-in radio programme, which he hosts, fields questions and responds to members of the public. This serves to broaden the accessibility of the public to Government information at the highest level.

I should also mention that as part of its commitment to freedom of the press, the Government of Jamaica led by the prime Minister, has established a special committee of eminent persons to review Jamaica's defamation laws. This is aimed at giving the media more room to manoeuvre in investigating social ills such as corruption in the society.

Institutional Framework

Madam Chair,

A number of institutional frameworks, including formal educational institutions, support the use of media for social wellbeing and change. Jamaica is home to the Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication (CARIMAC). This institution, supported by our own University of Technology (UTECH) and Northern Caribbean University, plays an important role in providing media education and training for practitioners both locally and across the Caribbean region. CARIMAC also plays a leading role in research and surveys to assess impact of media's output.

The recently revitalised Broadcasting Commission monitors the electronic media and sets standards to ensure wholesome and positive messages which redound to socio-psychological wellbeing of the population. To its credit, the Broadcasting Commission has taken steps to curb sexually explicit lyrics and violent content in the local entertainment industry, particularly music, which ultimately filters into mainstream media. Their initiative has the full support of the general public and efforts are currently underway to train and install volunteer broadcast monitors. Additionally, the Press Association of Jamaica plays an important role in monitoring standards and pushing training for journalists.

Private individuals and NGO's have also taken the mantle as media watchdogs in Jamaica. The **Women's Media Watch**, for example, is a civil society, non-profit organization which seeks to, *inter alia*, reduce gender-based violence in the media and in society in order to achieve balanced gender relations and gender equality; and to promote a gendered analysis of the media in order to increase awareness of the influence of the media in our lives.

Concluding Remarks

And so Madam Chair,

This is where we are in Jamaica today. The progress made by the media to date may not be as sophisticated as that of the developed world but it is recognized that this is an ongoing journey to attain and sustain excellence in media functioning and content for national wellbeing.

We need however to be sensitive to the threat posed by increasingly difficult and deteriorating economic realities to those laudable objectives. The shrinking advertising dollar will certainly test the media's mettle. It is to be hoped that progress made will not be undermined and that the media, with so much resting on the effective and responsible discharge of its mandate, will rise to and indeed surmount the challenge in what is really a fascinating time for the Jamaican media and also globally.

Issues of the media's interaction with the wider society will continue to be the subject of scrutiny, controversy and vigorous debate fed by the stark reality that the media have to be profitable in order to survive. The temptation of pandering to the sensationalist market is an ever present seductive diversion from boring mundane societal goals which don't excite the market. This therefore means that notions of promoting and sustaining standards of quality in terms of content consistent with desirable objectives of appropriate public taste, morality and ethics are always going to be coexisting in a dynamic state of antagonism.

I have shared with you only a small indication of what is being done in my country and I am proud to say that overall the Jamaican media recognizes, and in the main responds to the challenges of this environmental setting which also has its own challenges driven by changing realities in terms of issues of taste and morality.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your attention.