

Mr. Chairman,
Members of the Parliamentary Committee
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should commend the Committee for the work it has been doing in trying to keep the deliberations current – as current as addressing one of the most recent socio-cultural developments – the Gully/Gaza feud.

Mr. Chairman we note from the correspondence to us that at your meeting of November 11 the invitation to the MAJ was extended on the basis that “While the committee did not cast TOTAL blame on the media for the current situation, there was consensus that the media has a responsibility for monitoring what is aired.”

We must make the point that from your meeting of November 11, it took until November 26 for the correspondence to be penned to the MAJ and therefore gave us only 12 days in the busiest time of year for us to consult, research discuss and prepare a presentation for you.

We therefore apologise for the late circulation yesterday and offer therefore to speak in some detail to the submission that you have.

As a trade association of independent, competing members of the media industry, arriving at positions on matters like these in the MAJ usually take much deliberation. Very often broad consensus is reached but specific, detailed agreement on all points is rare.

We have done our best to pull together some of the key relevant issues relating to this fairly recent and evolving phenomenon, where no substantive research on the topic is available, no impact data has been done and where anecdotal evidence is at best, what we have to go by.

To the best of our knowledge of the reports on this matter, the Police have reported tension in some areas and concern for escalation of that tension but they do not appear to have had criminal matters attributed to the so-called “Gully-Gaza” issue.

It appears therefore that the overarching concern has to do with the potential for it to escalate into the creation of fanatical factions that translate contentious tones and gun lyrics into actual violence.

Further there appears to be particular concerns about children being drawn into the cross-talk, the display of violently suggestive paraphernalia depicting their support for one deejay or another and the possibility that this could become physically abusive/violent at the level of our schools and our youth.

I say all this to say Chairman that as a society we have gotten more and more concerned about these matters because we have seen the route many of them have taken in the past. Today the concern is Gully/Gaza, yesterday it was Rompin' Shop, last month it was Dagging and last year it was Dutty Wine!

My point is that our society has become a factory for the manufacture of this type of material which escalates from one base-level to another. So how should we respond to this "development?"

There is a feeling among some that this has been a perpetuation of the media! Many have offered the view that this type of material drives profit in media and therefore the profit seeking media perpetuates this.

This is simply not so Mr. Chairman. In fact, the more we play is the more we pay. There are many beneficiaries from the entertainment industry but media is not in the top rung. The fact is that music fads will come and go. Using one or the other to drive profit is not practical or contemplated; it is a part of the cycle. Do you recall when – I feel like bombing a church..." were violent lyrics that were spouted by Marley or when some of King Yellow-man's songs were labeled some of the most potent corrupting lyrics? Or when "Mi Get de ting Dem" was not just social commentary but was perpetuating violence?

Media cannot be credited nor blamed for the rise and fall of these cultural "developments" – even though (we accept that) media cannot claim to be uninvolved in the process.

Media houses are involved in the process of the discourse that has come to your attention from a number of standpoints. (1) There has been legitimate reporting in the media on the growth of this feud. Some of the reporting is in major prime time news bulletins as the feud was depicted in material at schools and concerns were raised about that. We reported the concerns. Some believe that media ought not to have given it any airtime.

However, there is entertainment news and entertainment news includes this issue. (2) Some say it is because we have reported it why it has become such an issue. We cannot claim that this position is totally incorrect, but the cause and effect debate has not been solved for many issues.

How else would people know of some of the material to which their children are being exposed? How else would you become aware of the impact of it on the fabric of society and the need to address it?

There is a dilemma that media face, Mr. Chairman. It is the dilemma of some persons believing that reporting equals "promoting" or that discussing means "supporting".

The matter of "promoting" is not a simple matter! We have seen our major regulator interpret our airing of material as "promoting" the material. Nothing is further from the truth!

So much of what we report is of concern to us and so much is uninteresting to individuals but they have to report it.

In today's Jamaica and in a globalised world, we also must face the realistic and formidable challenge that on the Internet, in blogs and in downloads there is far greater discussion and exchange of open, sometimes potent views, that make reporting on radio or TV, pale in comparison – and where promoting self interest, the interests of the entertainment business is huge.

Many do not stop to investigate how much new media have been attractive to young people and how much unfiltered material they have access to outside mainstream radio and television. It may be a very useful study to track and correlate the access to violent, graphic, sexual content on computers, phones and cable TV, to the escalation in certain behaviours in Jamaica.

The Gaza/Gully matter spreading into schools was known to you as a result of it being reported. The ridiculous level to which it has reached is known to us because of what has been reported too and the several concerns expressed over it are concerns known to all of us because those concerns have been given voice through media reports.

In the entertainment reporting, some have given voice to which deejay is supporting which side – and those in our industry who perpetuate this must be a part of this introspection and this review of the harm that this causes.

It seems to us, that the issue is therefore not in the reporting of this matter, but in the nature of the matter itself. It is not a case where if we shoot the messenger, the bad news or the message would disappear – it would only be accessed more through other sources.

Again, we submit to you that the solution does not lie in regulator-censorship or self-censorship. It lays in the root of the problem – the drivers that fuel the production, proliferation and the growth of the material that is deemed and agreed in many cases to be harmful.

Mr. Chairman, we are aware that in your previous sitting you heard from the Executive Director of the Broadcasting Commission and in perusing his comments I found it interesting to note the following statement: "I think there is anecdotal evidence that there is an improvement in the quality of songs and videos being produced for airplay."

I need not go further. He seems to agree or I agree that the source of the problem is in the nature, character and quality of the material being produced. Our emphasis must be on the quality of the productions – and must be on what influences that content being produced. If as the Executive Director went on to opine, the quality of what is being aired is getting better as seen through what is being produced then we have the source to which we can turn attention to seek to improve the quality of output to our population – the production.

Certainly, we must accept in media, and we have accepted that some of the material that was being played on air was borderline and some of it was over the line. Some of it had no place on radio and television and now that it is off it must stay off. However, none of those songs were produced by a media house. We must together tackle the source of production!

It is our view that calling singers and deejays to Jamaica House to reason with them about

toning down the rhetoric, cutting down on the hostility in the lyrics and making statements to fans that after all the venom that was spewed, it really was not serious – is Mr. Chairman, in our view not the example we would endorse. We must quite frankly say to our artistes and musicians that we expect better, better from them.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I recall being invited to Jamaica House in the heights of the “Rompin’ Shop” /Ban the Music and chastise the media issue. The female deejay engaged in the Rompin Shop song was present.

I remembered that this the young woman who sang this most vulgar, demeaning and outrageous song, was in the presence of the Prime Minister and at least one other Minister commended on how talented she was; and when she spoke and declared that as an adult she needed her space to express herself and her creativity in this way – there were many who agreed with her and assured her that she has that right to that space and that she can have that space and time, but the media ought not to air it.

No one told her that the material she was pervading was a shame on women and should not be emanating from her mouth in public or in private, much more in a recording studio.

If we send the wrong signals we will have the results to show. As the MAJ said then, we repeat now, let us in media, government, and civil society do the right thing – set the right standards and uphold them.

Mr. Chairman, one of the questions asked was how did some of this material get on the air in the first place?

A part of it was in how regulation was being done, but that has changed.

The minute the Commission instituted an industry directive, the landscape changed. One station pushing the envelope would not be wise anymore.

The Commission’s actions entered the realm of what so many institutions in Jamaica have failed to do – establish clear positions, establish a monitoring mechanisms, apply it to all and when one is caught there are penalties.

Mr. Chairman, the substantive point is that through clear guidelines, monitoring, identification of breach and a certainty of action when breaches happen, there has been change and can always be change.

Unfortunately, the change may not be lasting in media Mr. Chairman, precisely because the airing of material on radio and television is not the SOURCE of our problem.

We suggest that tightening the screws on media is unlikely to cause the society to see much and lasting improvement.

We say that for two reasons.

1. Of the 22 free-to-air radio licensees that exist in Jamaica today about 10 or less than half play the dominant dancehall music – why isn't the greater number able to have greater impact?
2. Of the three television stations, there is a strong counter balance of material directed at wholesome family values – the morning shows are edifying, information driven and meager on popular culture presentation; there are children's programmes at daytime; there are school programmes all year round, from quizzes to choir competitions and talent shows. Why isn't this overwhelming positive not reflected in a greater positive impact? The answer is because even that overwhelming positive material is minimal in comparison to what our society is exposed to.

We note that across the Caribbean, they now hear more of the material banned in Jamaica on radio than you could hear here; YET, their behaviour is not as negative as is ours. This tells us, Chairman that the problem has been misdiagnosed and the treatment is for the wrong problem.

Members of the Committee, not long after the Commission had its high profile launch of its crackdown on media an article was written in the Daily Gleaner by the MAJ expressing our support to clean up the airways, but warning that the efforts will soon come to naught if we failed to act in a cross-sectoral manner with clear and consistent action. Among the points we made were:

1. Our research had shown that more of our young people were getting their music content from the Internet, Ipods, CDs, dancehall venues, parties, taxis, buses and public spaces, such as bus parks – where the content was unfiltered, graphic and potent, when compared to what is accessible anywhere in the media;
2. Our research showed that children were being exposed to many, many channels of graphic pornographic material on cable television. This included several foreign channels, but involved local pornographic cable channels as well. This has made boys into men and young girls into women – “forced ripe” we would call it where I am from in St. Mary. There is no mystery, no mystique, nothing but raw open pornography.
3. Much of the pornography was being recorded in sessions on our streets. Open sex, violent sex, simulated sex, just a lot of sexual activity. The society has been put in sexual overdrive and that is hardly on radio and free to air TV, it is in our streets and on cable TV.
4. We found that there was open pornographic material being shown on DVD players in taxis and buses transporting school children, and that in fact, some buses were having “schoolers” only trips in which school children were tactically seated or loaded to encourage sexual activity.
5. All that was mixed with some school children and their friendly bus operators designating

some school days “no panty days”. More pornography coupled with a “rude bwoy” and a “rude gal” culture.

6. The mix is being served up with alcoholic beverages that were being sold to children from small refrigerators built in on many of these buses;

7. The buses were usually heavily tinted and could often be seen off route, as they sought to have longer than usual time with their passengers.

The MAJ said then, that this mixture of pornography, unedited, unfiltered, lewd music, nakedness, alcohol and the dark tint on buses was creating a most potent source of impact on young people that had little interest in traditional media and who had to be saved by stronger action – not the banning of bleeping in songs.

We committed then to work with the Commission, authority bodies and Ministries to tackle this problem, as banning music on radio and television alone would not suffice. We wrote to the Transport Minister and urged action.

Thankfully although several months later, we saw some action from the Transport Authority and the Police aimed at tackling some of this. But is it sustained?

We wrote again, recently offering over six million dollars in airtime promotion and public education time and space to support the removal of DVD's, CD players and tint from public passenger vehicles, and to encourage upholding the law. We have not as yet had that taken up.

We wrote and then met with the National Transformation Programme in the Office of the Prime Minister offering to work with them on encouraging transformation and a return to Law and Order. We have started some work there but much needs to be done and quicker.

We have continued to work with the media created initiative, (PALS), Peace and Love in Schools, and we will continue that.

We have for 20 years work with Crime Stop – to the tune of what the Chairman recently said is about \$40M per year of support and that continues.

We have been working with the Local Government department on the Ananda Alert to help locate our missing children some of whom have graduated from taxis and buses with pornography to being agents of prostitution, unwanted pregnancies and victims of abuse.

All this we do as our contribution to improving the quality of life and the Social and Human Resource Development in the country.

We have reported on the good the bad and the ugly in the society. We have not been perfect, but we have done our part to make a positive impact. Whether it is on Gully or Gaza, on Dagginger or on Rompin' Shop, the messenger is not the source, the source is deeply

embedded in some socio-economic challenges that must be tackled before the venom of lyrical violence is spewed on the society, and some unfortunate souls react to it.

We know that it is the stand taken by us in media, in public office, in civic organisations and in our communities that will make the difference – yet many of us fail to do it.

We know Sir that we cannot do it alone and that we stand a better chance doing it together – yet we stand apart and tear each other down.

Let us form those cross sectoral teams, identify those regulations and the laws that need to be strengthened and implemented, and then let us tackle the gullies one by one and the Gazas one by one, until we make real progress together, rather than continue to be held up as individual failures.

We urge that:

1. The laws on indecent exposure, profanity and similar offences be revised, given teeth and strong community service sentences be given when persons are guilty to make them an example and make them work on addressing some societal ill;
2. Laws are to be enforced, monitored and maintained to remove illegal music instruments from public passenger vehicles;
3. The rules governing the routes buses ply must be inflexibly adhered to;
4. The language used in dance halls, entertainment show and concerts should be policed and examples be made of those using corrupt and indecent language;
5. The laws making it mandatory that children are in schools and not on the streets are to be enforced;
6. Conduct in public spaces should be regulated and sanctions be imposed without fear or favour;
7. That we rid street walls of graffiti of slackness, violence and gang glorification and replace them with sporting icons, National heroes, student achievers and respected professionals – not crews and gangsters;
8. That we impose the law fiercely on selling of alcohol to children especially on PPVs;
9. That we remove the pornographic channels from cable – not just require that they are scrambled;
10. That we take up the offer of media to maintain the new higher standards in content being aired, but more importantly we use up the millions of dollars in airtime offered to promote law and order, show up double-standard and encourage compliance with Law.

Thank You