

The following are the MAJ Chairman's remarks given at a Symposium themed "A Framework for Media Self-Regulation" held at CARIMAC on October 29, 2014 hosted by the ACM Education Committee:

MAJ CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The MAJ is in full support of responsible media and more importantly responsible journalism in Jamaica. We believe that a media which is fair to all and balanced is critical for development of this nation and its people. Our role is to inform on all things in the public interest and bring transparency to public affairs to ferret out corruption. We are Jamaica's biggest ally in the search of truth. Do we get it right all of the time? Surely not, there is many an obstacle in the way of our search for truth and stamping out corruption, including libel laws which while modernized very recently, do not give media a greater power to tackle corruption than we had before. And then there are the corrupt themselves who will employ all sorts of measures and tactics to frustrate media efforts. This unfortunately means that sometimes, in our determined effort to bring truth to light, our journalists get it wrong or without the ability to reveal sources we are made to look like we got it wrong.

MAJ members are guided at a minimum by a journalism code of ethics, jointly developed with the PAJ which represents the working journalists. Most of our members have long adopted this code in earlier form (that is, excluding the proposal to establish a press council) , or even more comprehensive codes of practice, to guide their journalists in pursuit of their work. Most of our members have either publicized or are in the process of publicizing the codes to which they abide. Some have gone further by formalizing and publicising long held mechanisms for processing public complaints. We agree that greater public awareness on what they can expect from media houses in cover protocol or when things go wrong is necessary.

We firmly believe that where we do get the facts wrong, we collectively agree that we should correct.

We all realize that "customer service" and how we deal with our clients brings competitive advantage in this media industry. Credibility is the most important trading currency we have.

The MAJ supports Self regulation, practiced individually by media houses. We do not subscribe to the view that external bodies or "forces" other than our reading or viewing public and the courts (in the case of libel or defamation) should be allowed to adjudicate and penalize on matters of breach of our code. We believe in managing our own affairs and remaining independent in order to truly provide that plurality of views this country needs. This is very important to us.

We support the employers having full jurisdiction over employees against these standards. At the heart of most violations of code is a journalist's work. Content developed by journalists, your members, accounts for the bulk of what we share with the public. We believe that if a journalist's work is in violation of the code then the media house should be left to employ its own measures of correcting the wrong and "guiding" the employee to being more responsible.

We are happy to receive guidance from and engage in dialogue with those with expertise and/or experience in similar cases in arriving at a decision on how to treat, but the decision must remain that of the media house. Any person still aggrieved by a published story has the remedy of the courts with increasingly the help of hungry lawyers creating a more litigious society.

The bottom line is that we do not support the establishment of a bureaucracy to be funded by media to determine universal standards and breaches and recommend sanctions across the board.

Jamaica's press freedom depends on our ability to maintain the highest journalistic standards possible and we must manage this ourselves.

Thank you.