

The Media Association Jamaica Limited (MAJ) celebrates, along with Jamaica, the passing in the House of Representatives, on November 5, 2013, of the Defamation Act 2013 which will replace the Libel and Slander Act, of 1851, and the Defamation Act of 1961.

Yesterday's passing of the bill was a milestone achievement from a process which began in 2007 with the appointing of a committee of stakeholders from various sectors of the society under the stewardship of Justice Hugh Small, to review the libel laws of the country. That the present administration saw it fit to continue the process and bring it to this milestone is testament to the importance accorded to freedom of expression and freedom of the media in Jamaica and a unifying belief, across party lines, in doing what is necessary to preserve that right.

The single most important element of this reform is the abolishment of criminal libel which now means that no Jamaican can be imprisoned for the spoken or written word which is proven to be defamatory.

Other aspects of the new Act largely reflect a response to evolution of technology, legal jurisprudence and improving efficacy of application of the Law.

In spite of the passage of the new legislation, the MAJ remains concerned that the new Act has not gone far enough in enabling a greater degree of accountability of public officials in their public lives and better equipping media to tackle corruption which is so pervasive in our country. We remain committed to building on these gains by pursuing other changes, when the next opportunity arises.

The MAJ would like to thank all of those who worked diligently to make yesterday's milestone

moment possible and especially the “Small Committee” (headed by Justice Hugh Small, comprising Attorneys-at-Law, representatives from Jamaicans for Justice, the Opposition, the Jamaica Bar Association, Media Association and the Press Association) and the Joint Select Committees of Parliament.