

## CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

The theme for World Press Freedom Day this year is “Media Freedom for a Better Future: Shaping the Post-2015 Development Agenda”. As we mark this global commemoration, the Media Association Jamaica Limited (MAJ) notes that Jamaica, while ranking highly on the 2014 World Press Freedom Index at 17th place, has slipped 4 places in the last year. We urge Jamaicans to strive to improve on this record for the benefit of our democracy, our country’s development and, by extension, our people. We simply cannot afford, especially now, further retardation of Jamaica’s development.

Today, the MAJ reflects upon the 2013 Defamation Act passed in the House of Parliament at the end of 2013, replacing the Libel and Slander Act of 1851 and the Defamation Act of 1961. The single most important element of this reform was 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.

The MAJ however remains concerned that the new Defamation Law has not gone far enough in enabling pursuit of a greater degree of accountability in our public affairs and better equipping media to tackle corruption which is so pervasive in our country. Today, we renew our commitment to vigorously pursue the changes necessary to accomplish this goal.

Today, we reiterate our concerns on the potential negative fallout for traditional media from recommended changes in government policy and, specifically, proposed changes to acts and regulations governing broadcast media. Unfortunately, these changes, if implemented now, and in current form, threaten the viability of the industry. We believe that the existing harsh economic climate offers little accommodation for the types of policy changes considered, however, notwithstanding this, we encourage modern, practical, effective legislation and regulation which advances the industry and provides for level playing field for all media: traditional and non-traditional. Indeed, we ourselves commit to modernizing and expanding our services for the benefit of Jamaica.

Today we can celebrate having survived yet another year without losing any of our journalists to violence whilst on the job. However, we note with great concern, and harshly condemn, threats reportedly made in recent times against some reporters. Our committed journalists work diligently in search of truth and must be allowed to carry out their work on behalf of Jamaican citizens without threats or acts of violence against them. We stand in solidarity with all our journalists on this concern.

Suppression of media freedoms, in whatever form, is a threat on democracy and development. Media play a critical role in disseminating information in the public's interest; our work is on your behalf. We therefore urge the Caribbean region to come together in active defense of press freedom.

On this World Press Freedom Day, the Association vows to continue to: encourage and uphold a healthy environment of press freedom, advocate for greater media rights and access to information, push for consistent and fair legal and regulatory practices, while committing to responsible self-regulation, and adhering to the highest journalistic ethics.