

The Media Association Jamaica Limited is cautioning parliamentarians to be very careful about trampling on freedom of expression and freedom of the press as a reaction to media reports with which they have issues or disagreement.

The Association was extremely disappointed by reports from yesterday's sitting of parliament's Constituency Development Fund Committee (CDFC) where Chairman Everaldo Warmington lashed out against the media and suggested that members could move a motion to close the meeting to the media.

"It is entirely unacceptable in 2010, when accountability, transparency and responsibility in public life should be the norm, that the media or the society should accept a threat to bar the public accessing information that is in the public interest and is about the spending of tens of millions of taxpayers' money," the MAJ said. It noted that the Chairman and Committee members have a right to be critical of any media report and of any misrepresentation it observes, but it is wholly unacceptable that parliamentarians could contemplate hiding behind closed doors, thus penalizing the people and the nation by depriving them of public information.

The MAJ emphasized that while parliamentarians have a right to defend their actions and speak out against any report it disagrees with, the manner and the tenor of how the people's representatives do so, cannot be with contempt. The Media Association urges all those who have differing views to respectfully debate those views and allow the wider community to form its own positions.

The MAJ notes that the Press Association of Jamaica, PAJ, has responded to the specifics of the journalistic issues raised about standard and appropriateness, and the MAJ offers to assist in any way it can to move the process forward. The MAJ warned however, that it will not stand by and allow gains made over many decades of access to information and improved accountability to be whimsically eroded.

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