

Guyana Press Association - World Press Freedom Day 2019 Statement

The Guyana Press Association salutes all retired and active journalists here and in the Diaspora, as we observe this year's activities under the theme "Media for Democracy. Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation". We thank them for their contributions to the development of Guyana, Caribbean and elsewhere through this noble profession- journalism.

We also salute our technical personnel – photographers, videographers, editors, engineers and technicians, layout personnel, print operators, website and Social Media managers- without whom our media products will largely remain a secret.

The Press Association sees this year's World Press Freedom Day as one that offers the opportunity for serious introspection. The reality in Guyana is that many media houses are politically aligned, resulting in a deliberate blurring of the lines of freedom of expression to achieve self-serving political outcomes for their preferred political parties. This results in disinformation and the cultivation of a culture of bias among journalists. This destroys the essence of the ethical standards and principles that they are expected to abide by in the delivery of news and information.

The executive of the Guyana Press Association unreservedly condemns those media houses and practitioners who maliciously pursue narrow political agenda in the furtherance of their political handlers.

While freedom of expression is enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Guyana's Constitution, the Guyana Press Association urges media houses to consider crafting Social Media Policies to guide especially their editorial staff. This should be seen as a safeguard against them taking private positions, especially on political-related issues that may be construed as the official position of their media outlets. In certain situations, such personal positions can ultimately endanger the safety of reporters in the field during elections coverage.

Our Association also calls on our colleagues to research, fact-check and ensure there is balance and fairness through a wide variety of perspectives in your content. Always be mindful of hidden political agenda of even your most trusted sources.

At the same time, the Guyana Press Association calls on primarily politicians to cease attacking media houses when factual stories are written that they do not like. Recent unapologetic and brazen attacks on the media by senior government and opposition politicians do not serve to create a conducive environment for Guyanese to consume journalistic material to allow them to elect representatives of their choice at periodic elections. On the contrary, such attacks, as history has shown right here in Guyana, resulted in physical attacks by supporters of political parties.

In an era where there is an explosion of various delivery channels of information, there is an even more important and significant role for journalism in which fairness, impartiality and fact-checking are the key watchwords or if you like, hashtags. Indeed, our Association cites the need for human and technical resources to be allocated to utilize existing Social Media tools and develop new ones to deliver accurate and timely information especially on political and electoral reporting.

As Guyana enters the period of electioneering, the Guyana Press Association on this occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2019, urges the media to explore available opportunities beyond their routine daily news productions to produce content that explore issues of democracy, peace and reconciliation.

In conclusion, we endorse the position taken by our regional umbrella organization, the Association of Caribbean Media Workers, that "The challenge is that despite having more access to information than ever before, disinformation is more rampant than ever. Let us recommit as journalists to call out disinformation wherever we see it and embrace the basic tenets of good journalism by giving verified facts without the taint of bias".

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