



3rd May 2024

Guyana Press Association World Press Freedom Day 2024 Statement

The Guyana Press Association salutes all media workers in Guyana for this World Press Freedom Day 2024. The UNESCO Theme, “A Press for the Planet: Journalism in the face of the Environmental Crisis,” not only places media workers on the frontline of another crisis and highlights the importance of the press in addressing challenges brought on by the environmental crisis but it also gives us an opportunity to work towards solutions.

In Guyana, the press observes this WPFDD at a time when the country faces a prolonged dry spell which seems to be now abating in a number of regions, an uncontrolled solid waste management crisis to varying degrees in many areas, and dismally poor environmental management of a number of gold mining and coastal sea defence areas. Dried and cracked canals, increased food prices and shortages of staples such as cassava all point to a world and a country in the throes of a deep environmental crisis. At a global level, scientists attribute such a phenomenon to climate change which, as we had seen in 2005, also causes devastating floods and can also trigger dangerous rise in sea levels to the detriment of Guyana's coastland where the majority of people live, work and produce their food. On a larger scale, what is visible is a country where littering and indiscriminate waste disposal is now a national pastime with authorities failing dismally to prosecute perpetrators and collect waste in a timely manner. The local, regional and central governments must take collective blame for the state of our country's environmental crisis- dirty

streets and parapets, clogged drains and canals, and unregulated and unofficial dumpsites/garbage piles.

The huge Martian-like scars could be seen in Guyana's gold mining areas where there is no back-filling of mined out areas, miners have changed the course of creeks and rivers and there are huge questions surrounding the actual use of mercury abatement techniques and the eventual elimination of mercury use. Many of our Indigenous Amerindian communities have no alternative but to use polluted water for their domestic use and as a source of fish.

Similarly, the coastline near the sea defence structure symbolises bad waste disposal practices in our towns and villages when one takes into consideration the millions of plastic drink bottles and other debris that wash up and wash off with each tide. Sections of the sea defence are now veritable dumping grounds for domestic and commercial waste. No one seems to care.

All this is happening before our very eyes while the blame game between government and the opposition continues.

Taken together- solid waste and climate phenomena- Guyana is indeed facing an environmental crisis.

Then, what's needed by the media is constant and sustained training of a pool of specialist journalists whose task will be to simplify science information to make it palatable and connected to their daily lives. The Guyana Press Association also recommends that the Guyana government, private sector and various United Nations organisations inject resources into special serialised productions on environmental issues that will go beyond the average news story whose lifecycle is perhaps one day or a few hours or even minutes. At the same time, media workers need to jealously guard against oil resources being used to bribe them from covering the real issues or engaging in disinformation.

The Guyana Press Association also calls for an end to manufactured segregation and division in

our society as the nation seeks to tackle the environmental crisis. The convenience of engaging the Guyana Press Association needs to cease immediately. Inasmuch, as an institution, the Association is always ready and willing to work for the national good, it cannot be at the behest of the political directorate.

Sadly, neither the Minister of Natural Resources Vickram Bharrat nor the Head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Khemraj Parsram responded to the Association's invitation to participate in its event for World Press Freedom Day 2024. However, the Association responded in the affirmative to the government's invitation to participate in its World Press Freedom Day event.

In light of the intolerable discourtesy extended to the Press Association by Mr Bharrat and Mr Parsram, the Guyana Press Association decided to withdraw its well-intentioned participation in the government-organised event.

The GPA wants to take this opportunity to reiterate its commitment to building the capacity of our media workers as we remain open to pursuing specialised training covering various issues. This is evident with our proposals to the PAHO/WHO and the Ministry of Health in 2023 to help our journalists understand and report on suicides in Guyana, our proposal to the Ministry of Health to assist the media with training to help assist with its campaign on HPV Vaccines and our commitment to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation to ensure that press be informed before it informs on challenges to Guyana's sovereignty.

The GPA takes this opportunity to call on citizens to ensure the protection of media workers in Guyana. There has been an alarming increase in online attacks against media workers. In some cases, women are trolled and bullied, in other cases, some of our journalists are met with aggression by public officials when asking probing questions. GPA also calls on the Guyana Police Force to act swiftly in several matters before the police involving media workers. These

including the cyber bullying meted out to journalist Davina Bagot in 2023, shooting incident involving journalist Travis Chase in 2023 and the alleged sexual assault against the photographer also last year.

As we end our statement, the GPA calls on all to make a valuable commitment towards saving our planet.

ENDS/GPA/2024