

The role of the media in combating corruption and strengthening governance

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Let me first express appreciation to the main sponsors of this important workshop, the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association and The Caribbean Broadcasting Union for the invitation to address you. Despite a very demanding schedule I readily accepted your invitation to speak on the **Role of the media in combating corruption and in strengthening governance.**

This theme could hardly be more timely if we understand corruption to be the use of position or power – **whether political, financial, social or media power – for illicit gain or advantage.** And if we understand governance to be the **arrangements through which a society and a people exercise control over power and manage the direction of their development.** Clearly corruption in all its forms ultimately undermines governance and to combat corruption effectively governance needs to be strengthened.

In this, the media has a critical role to play, indeed **the extent to which the media is free to play this role is one indicator of good governance.** On this indicator, the Caribbean states are doing fairly well. Comparatively speaking the glass is half full. In this regard while being justly critical of serious deficiencies in governance across the region, we should take some comfort in our record on Press Freedom. The authoritative, globally recognized **Freedom House Organization** ranks all CARICOM states save Guyana, Haiti and Antigua in the top one third of almost 200 countries in 2010 rated for levels of press freedom. **In fact Jamaica and St Lucia are in the top 10% ahead of the US, Canada, the UK and other mature democracies when it comes to press freedom.** [In 2011, St Lucia remained on top but Jamaica fell marginally below the US while remaining ahead of the UK and Canada] Reporters, broadcasters, media owners, editors all should be appreciated for this rating: as well those who hold political and economic power for not

infringing on press freedom to the extent that happens, regrettably, in so many other countries in the world.

In this context allow me to comment on one aspect of the role of the media in strengthening governance - that is the role of combating corruption within its own ranks. And allow me to make reference to current developments in the UK and further a field in relation to NewsCorp, the media empire of Rupert Murdoch. **Here is the clearest case of the use of media power for illicit advantage thereby contaminating governance with corrupt relations between the press, the politicians and the police.** That is the downside. But the upside is that it is the media itself that triggered what is the dismantling of a media empire before our very eyes and that is laying the base for strengthening governance in the UK and elsewhere. It is another newspaper, **The Guardian** and, most of all, an investigative reporter named Nick Davies whose persistence and courage should become a model for those who understand the media's role in combating corruption. Davies himself graduated from one of my former Universities, Oxford in 1974 – he worked as a stable attendant, a builder and a railway guard and he himself was inspired to go into media by the role models of investigative journalism the 1970s – Woodward and Bernstein. It was their exposé on the “Watergate Scandal” which led to President Nixon's resignation, to strengthening of governance arrangements in the US to deal with campaign finance and to Davies himself deciding to try his hand in journalism.. He started as a messenger at The Guardian; he is now an investigative reporter following leads, demonstrating courage and taking on the **News of the World**. And as the saying goes the rest is unfolding history as the corrupt in high places, the corrupt in untouchable places are being exposed, tendering resignations and prosecuted one by one.

There is much in Murdoch affair on which we should reflect. **First of all**, overconcentration of ownership in media and therefore over concentration of media power can itself facilitate corruption of governance. Hence a main role of the media,

more precisely of those who stand for integrity within the media, as well as a main role of regulation – self regulation and external regulation – in respect of the media is to be eternally vigilant in the context of concentrated ownership. The media must lead by example not just by precept. In relation to combating corruption the Murdoch debacle teaches that in strengthening governance the media must be alert to any corruption within its own ranks.

A second aspect of the role of media in combating corruption is to expose and report the facts relating to corruption particularly in high places, in the private and in the public sector, without fear or favour. At the grassroots level Caribbean people by and large appear to be extricating themselves from everyday, sometimes called, 'petty corruption'. In this regard the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) 2010 measures the people's experience in five CARICOM states, (Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Belize and Haiti) of involvement in bribery or attempted bribery of police officers, government employees, local government officials etc. so called "corruption victimization".

The good news is that only 8% of Jamaica's population and 9% of Trinidad and Tobago's population have reported having experience of bribery at this level. This is amongst the lowest of 26 Latin American and Caribbean countries studied. Belize and Guyana are at the mid-point with 17% each and Haiti experiences the highest level of the countries measured at 54%. **It should be noted that Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago's experience of corruption victimization is three times lower than the global average where one in four people in 86 countries around the world report paying bribes in the 2010 Global Corruption Barometer. So much for the people's experience of what is described as petty corruption.**

Now the bad news. At the level of perception of corruption, the story is quite different. **Amongst the 26 countries measured, the people of Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica perceived their country as the most corrupt with Guyana**

not far behind. In terms of country by country polling, surveys show that our people regard corruption as among the most negative aspect of our territories. **In election-after election in the last 10 to 20 years across the region, corruption scandals have been significant; governments have been removed largely on grounds of being corrupt and replaced by oppositions largely on the basis of promises of integrity only to repeat the cycle subsequently, thereby reconfirming popular concern with the issue of corruption and contributing to public cynicism.**

One critical role of the media is to confirm, to qualify or to contradict with evidence and analysis the people's perception that corruption is rampant in high places.

So far media has played in the Caribbean an important role in at least one key area – exposing, editorializing and analyzing corruption in public contract awards, in abuse of corporate power, in bringing to light external influences in campaign financing and party funding across the region. To one degree or another Caribbean media has exposed illicit and inappropriate links between high ranking politicians on the one hand and on the other **transnational criminal gangsters and organizations like the Shower Posse, foreign corporations like Trafigura Beheer in Jamaica, the Stanford Empire** (in Antigua and Barbuda and St Vincent and the Grenadines), the Lord Ashcroft dominated banks (such as in the Turks and Caicos), **foreign governments directly or indirectly impacting campaign finance** (most notably Taiwan in St Lucia), **illegal ponzi financial schemes** (such as Olint in Jamaica) and, of course, big **local private sector entities** (such as Clico in Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados).

For these exposés the media must be appreciated. We in Jamaica can well recall the critical role of the media in ensuring the extradition of Christopher 'Dudus' Coke. In

January 2010 there were 9 editorials, letters and columns dealing with this matter in our 3 print media. By May, this had reached a crescendo of 206. It was no accident that Coke was extradited in May - that very same month.

Important as this is however it does not go far enough. The media's role has to extend beyond exposure to advocacy in at least two areas: **filling legislation loop holes and in ensuing law enforcement in relation to the untouchables in the Caribbean.** Ask yourselves; **How come in so many CARICOM states, there is *prima facie* evidence pointing to irregular procurement procedures, bribery payments as well as kickbacks and improper expenditure of public funds yet there is little or no successful investigation, prosecution and conviction of persons in high places? When last has there been a prosecution or conviction for 'illicit enrichment', a crime in most of our territories in conformity with the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption which most of our territories have ratified? How many Auditor General's Reports exposing irregularities and corrective measures are followed by the punishment of those guilty of the breaches?**

One reason is a major gap in our governance arrangements – **the absence of a regulatory framework for political parties and in particular party funding and campaign financing.** How can it be acceptable that the Caribbean in 2011 remains the only zone in the democratic world in which political parties have no requirement to be legally registered nor to declare who gives them how much money? In law, parties remain private clubs though exercising public and social power. In strengthening governance **it is imperative that legislation be enacted to require the registration of political parties, transparency in their operations and, most of all, regulation of party funding and campaign finance.** The media has a critical role not just in exposing scandals that can lead to the removal of one government whom the electorate believe to be very corrupt; only to

replace it with another government who the electorate believe to be relatively clean only to discover that the new government behaves in a manner as corrupt as the old. A key way to strengthen governance is to facilitate accountability in between elections as well as during elections.

As we speak, in Jamaica, the Parliament has approved the Electoral Commission's recommendations relating to the registration and funding of parties. That was November last year; it is now July 2011. All well thinking Jamaicans inside and outside the political parties but, most of all, the media must demand enactment of the legislation to register parties and to regulate party funding. **Equally the Electoral Commission of Jamaica just last month (June) after extensive consultations with the political parties and civil society has produced a report dealing with campaign financing – establishing limits for campaign donations, limits for campaign expenditure, conditions for state funding of campaigns, reporting and disclosure regulations dealing with contributions to parties. This report is attracting significant support from civil society, all well thinking Jamaicans and the media in particular must demand prompt endorsement by our political parties and enactment of legislation well before the next general election.**

So plugging legislative loop holes is critical but enforcement of the law is equally so, if we are to more successfully combat corruption and to strengthen governance. In this regard we and the media must demand that there should be no untouchables. **Investigation, successful prosecution and incarceration of those guilty of paying bribes and taking bribes must be demanded and pursued with “Nick Davies type” courage and determination.**

Ladies and Gentlemen may I conclude with this advisory: available evidence suggests the Caribbean people are getting tired of corruption in high places and of economic distress which accompanies the corrupt use of resources needed for

development. They are losing confidence in the apparent inability of democratic governance to cope more effectively with corruption, with the continuing underperformance of our economies which it inevitably carries with it and with the blocking of opportunities for a better life for the 'man in the street'. The LAPOP 2010 Survey reveals that on a scale of 0 – 100, the support for dangerous authoritarianism must be of deep concern. In Jamaica it was 34, Trinidad and Tobago 33, Guyana 39 and Belize 48 in support of a military coup. This is a most serious development in what hitherto is a zone in which the edifice of democracy has appeared unassailable.

But there is now a Tropical Depression called corruption, it can but need not become a Tropical Storm. **It can and need not become a Category 5 hurricane. The media has a critical role to play in dispersing the storm clouds and in strengthening governance. In playing the role the key target is for the media to be alert to any corrupt contaminants within its own ranks and to focus on legislation and law enforcement in what is now the main arena of corruption: namely public contracting, party regulation, campaign finance.**