

RJR-Gleaner Communications Group  
**INAUGURAL J.A. LESTER SPAULDING LECTURE**  
Theme: Freedom of the Press in Jamaica  
Wednesday, May 3, 2023 at Studio One, Broadcasting House

Guest Speaker:

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**Freedom of the Press in Jamaica – Speaking truth, defending credibility, advancing democracy**

### **Acknowledgements**

It is an honor to be delivering this commemorative lecture on such an important day as World Press Freedom Day 2023; but I am even more honored to be speaking at the inauguration of a series that pays tribute to such an outstanding icon in the media and communication industry, the late J.A. Lester Spaulding.

When I was asked by Sir Kenneth Hall months ago to consider doing this lecture he acknowledged my being a media man who believes in media and communication as tools for development; and that as someone who has been on the inside and outside of the industry at the practice and academic levels, I could bring an interesting perspective to Lester's incredible leadership in the media industry.

And so, here I am, here we are, on this special day when as the UN says, the international community celebrates the work of journalists and media workers... here we are paying tribute – and rightfully so – to a man whose vision and leadership remain decent standards and values that are not only worth remembering but also worth lifting up to others who aspire to be!

It is with humility then that I express gratitude to both of you gentlemen – Sir Kenneth and Mr. Gary Allen, CEO of the RJR-Gleaner Communications Group – and the committee responsible for staging and hosting this lecture.

Thanks also to my administrative assistant Miss Carla Edwards and my student assistant, Miss Alethia Campbell and of course, the work family at The University of the West Indies, Mona – Western Jamaica campus in the city of Montego Bay.

To my friends and colleagues in academia and in the industry, especially to those of you in that small group called **Di 3 a Wi**, thank you all for your constant support, and yes, I may soon yield to your continuous bugging me to have more direct classroom encounters with the students again. I truly appreciate you.

Of course I must express the deepest of gratitude for the love, patience and understanding of my family. I know that though my wife Doreen could not join me physically for this event, her sweet heart, genuine care and encouraging energy are very much present and I appreciate it.

## **Background**

The theme for this lecture is Freedom of the Press in Jamaica. Today is World Press Freedom Day, celebrated each year on May 3 to recognize the work of our journalists and media workers across the world.

The theme for this year's WPF is "Shaping a Future of Rights: Freedom of expression as a driver for all other human rights".

I will not be discussing rights or freedom of expression *per se* but I have framed my presentation around a topic that speaks to how media's commitment to safeguarding the right to information simultaneously tracks, shapes and guides the development of our people and our democracy as an independent country.

## **Freedom of the Press in Jamaica – Speaking truth, defending credibility, advancing democracy**

First, let me state my position on the role of media and communication systems in our society.'

In an article I wrote on grassroots communication that was published about a decade ago, I said:

“Media and communication as techniques and technologies, having both cultural and accounting functions and as central tools of the modernity project - due to their potent capacity for information dissemination and technological adaptability - are also themselves significant indicators of development.

Thus... the higher the incidence of modern media or the greater the access to modern information and communication technologies – computer, cell phones, Internet – the more developed (a) society (is) considered (to be).

As Arturo Escobar argues, media and communication technologies provide both direction and significance to modernist ideals.

Since media and communication have been significant to the construction of false notions of development, they must also play a critical role in both the deconstruction as well as the re-socialization of society...”

We must always look beyond the obvious distinctions between print, broadcast and film to other distinctions such as between media as business and media for development in seeking

to better understand and appreciate not only the role of media and communication in the democratic evolution of our society but also their function as simultaneously giving voice and being a catalyst for social action” (Prendergast in Caribbean Quarterly Vol 58, No.2/3, June – September 2012)

The second point has to do with the notions of freedom and independence. These words are not to be used interchangeable, nor are they to be considered as having the same meaning for operationalization. I know I can get into a little bit of a trouble here...but I will always seek to encourage conversations about freedom of the press and independence of media as symbiotic processes and outcomes, as performance and product, as instruction and accountant in the development of Jamaica and the Jamaican society.

There may be freedom of the press – and I will never seek to challenge the accuracy of the press freedom index which up to its last declaration ranked Jamaica as high among those countries that are safe place for the press – better than many who we continue to pedestalize as examples to model – but when it comes to an independent media, while we do come out in a favourable position on the press freedom index because of that, there may be issues of independence that students at our universities may want to explore.

Media independence is not just about freedom from political interference but also as freedom from financial interference. I believe that to be a critical element of Lester Spaulding’s legacy – understanding and appreciating the link between independent media and media freedom from a financing perspective.

So, even as we discuss the legacy of Lester Spaulding the activist advocate, the remarkable visionary, the astute collaborator, the people-centered manager, it is my hope that – even if we do not bring any new information to the table – we will have reignited something in all of us here to take a step back and reflect on:

- The significant growth and impact of Jamaican media since independence in 1962;
- The critical role of media in keeping the Jamaican public knowledgeable and aware – especially about government actions;
- Globalization and how the removal of barriers assist increased awareness of global news, politics, and culture and its influence on the life and destiny of our country and people; and
- How independent media are in the current polarized environment, and what do we do to improve on our high ranking on the press freedom index.

### **Press freedom and the WPF Index**

For those who have had the lived experienced working through the evolution of Jamaican media – especially over the last 30 years with the mushrooming of particularly broadcast media and the expansion of the newspaper space – there is certainly not much contention about who or what parts of the press are free. Those who consistently listen to the talk shows, the news shows, the news

reporters and producers, the opinion leaders and commentators, will regularly hear what comes across as genuine statements of fact, that neither the owners nor the managers of these media systems or news rooms interfere with the work or output of our news people and media workers.

Non-interference from owners is a common thread among contemporary media workers; but it had not always been so, especially during the period when there was more State-owned media. Today, there seem to be a high level of confidence in the news reporters, journalists, commentators and editors to abide by the professional standards that define excellence in journalism. Excellence is a direct threat to those who wish to interfere.

The World Bank defines freedom of the press as “the right to circulate opinions in print and other media without censorship by the government.”

The United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers."

I believe press freedom is more than about government censorship or the right to freedom of expression. Though these are major factors in determining press freedom, I maintain that we must consider always, the responsibilities to free press on both the part of those who create policy and establish regulations and those who are in the field being the people's watchdog.

Freedom of the press, like all other freedoms, comes with rights and responsibilities on all sides; therefore, all who are in media, in government, in the public market place, all who wish to exercise their right to freedom of expression, must at least know what these rights and responsibilities are if we are going to ensure that both freedom and associated rights are safeguarded. We cannot just be ok with picking at something only when we feel aggrieved, injured, or rubbed the wrong way.

According to UNESCO:

The WPF index calculate(s) the degree of freedom available to journalists in 180 countries by pooling the responses of experts to a questionnaire devised by Reporters without Borders (RSF) targeted to media professionals, researchers, academics and human rights defenders. The qualitative analysis is combined with the quantitative data on abuses and acts of violence against journalists during the period evaluated. The criteria considered in the questionnaire are pluralism, media independence, media environment and self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency, and the quality of the infrastructure that supports the production of news and information.

Jamaica usually scores well on these criteria. Generally, it is in the nuances of these criteria that we find the weak spots and so media must remain vigilant in keeping these freedoms from quietly

eroding or being quietly erased. For example, we ought to be more strident in ensuring that the quality of the supportive infrastructure include levels of training and education and specific standards for enlisting as a media professional. There ought to be established conditions to be regularly met for remaining a media professional!

As a country, Jamaica consistently ranked in the top 10 for several years – albeit usually in the bottom half of the top ten – but in the 2022 report dropped into the top 20 – yes, still closer to the top 10 at 12. But even the slightest of movement must give us cause for concern and stimulus to question whatever slight shifts there may be.

This year, 2023, we have dropped 20 places to 32, so we need to take a pause and ask: What is happening here? It is particularly concerning especially when we consider, for example, the humongous drop in the legislative index.

According to Christophe Deloire, Secretary General of the Reporters without Borders:

*The World Press Freedom Index shows enormous volatility in situations, with major rises and falls and unprecedented changes, such as Brazil's 18-place rise and Senegal's 31-place fall. This instability is the result of increased aggressiveness on the part of the authorities in many countries and growing animosity towards journalists on social media and in the physical world. The volatility is also the consequence of growth in the fake content industry, which produces and distributes disinformation and provides the tools for manufacturing it.*

Jamaica's ranking need deeper analysis and cannot be just passed over in a simple statement that **“the environment for journalism is “bad” in seven out of ten countries, and satisfactory in only three out of ten.”** (RSF 2023)

### **Press freedom and rights**

It is interesting that the theme for WPF Day 2023 speaks to, *shaping a future of rights!* My question is, are we prepared to be a rights-based media? This raises important questions – if not a dilemma – around both the regularly spoken of and the rarely spoken of rights, not just for the public but also for the journalists and reporters. For example, we do not talk a lot these days about the rights of journalists and media organizations not to reveal their sources, to launch ‘sting’ operations, and to be free from government interference; but, there is a lot of talk about media not doing enough investigative journalism.

Paradoxically, when some serious investigative work is done people get agitated, especially – and as it should be – in high places, in the rooms and halls of power. *We need to find out who are the sources of the leak!*

As Rowan Cruft in a December 2021 article in the **Journal of Applied Philosophy**, entitles Journalism and Press Freedom as Human Rights contends,

“The rights of journalists (however qualified) to protect their sources are normally justified by the interests of journalists in being able to collect information. But that interest is deemed to be worth protecting because it serves the public. That is, the journalist's interest is valued because of its usefulness to members of the public at large”. (Cruft, 2021 quoting Raz, 1994)

“It is ultimately for the good of the public that we hold moral duties not to force journalists to reveal their sources, rather than primarily for the good of the individual journalist. Legal duties operationalise these moral duties whose grounds are not the good of the individual journalist. Such duties (both moral and legal) seem to constitute role-based rights for journalists, and their non-individualistic ground (in the good of parties other than the journalist) seems to make them sharply distinct from human rights on the naturalistic view”.

Again, I throw this question from Cruft into the lap of our media workers and students as an area for interrogation: *What is the relation between journalists' role-based rights and human rights?*

Clearly, I agree with Cruft that:

“The rights of journalists to engage in communication are... not rights that they hold for their own sake... Like many roles, journalism is defined by constitutive norms – norms that explain the role's point, purpose, and limits. If one's behavior is governed by these norms (in some difficult-to-specify sense of ‘govern’), then one is a journalist – even if, as a bad journalist, one regularly violates the norms.

The human right to journalism and press freedom, Cruft argues, is a right that one's society allows and enables some people to engage in the practice constituted in bringing truth that is of public interest to an open and public audience, and in fulfilling a moral obligation, obtains that truth by means not allowed to ‘ordinary citizens’. Such person must not only be recognized as having special rights but should also be guaranteed certain protections including their moral obligation to protect their sources. That guarantee and privilege also comes with an awesome set of responsibilities for all involved in making the news, so to speak!

The legacy of Lester Spaulding requires that media workers remain vigilant in not only advancing the rights of the public but in advancing their legal and moral obligations to pursue truth.

### **Media freedom as support to the development of an independent society**

There was a course at CARIMAC that was about the history of the contemporary press, *From Printing Press to Podcast!* This was before IG or snapshot or any of the popular quick newsfeeds on social media.

In Jamaica, we could speak of the history of the press from the Jamaica Courant in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century to the Gleaner of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The survival of the Gleaner over its more than couple centuries of existence is the story of print journalism in Jamaica. Apart from the local

community based papers – the most popular and consistent of which is the Western Mirror, itself doing some 42 years (est. October 1980) – only a few national attempts have survived for any extended period.

**The Jamaica Observer** is this year celebrating 30 years (est. March 1993); but some of the well-known newspapers that have failed to stay the journey include, *Public Opinion*, *The Daily News*, and *The Jamaica Record*.

Understandably, while radio broadcasting, does not enjoy the long history of newspaper, its growth in Jamaica is phenomenal. This is a 20<sup>th</sup> century story; but generally, information communication technologies are probably the most rapidly changing and expanding new age technologies globally.

From John Grinan's ham radio and the call sign VP5PZ, public broadcasting began in late 1939. By 1940 the station became known as ZQI and ran for a decade before the government allowed for private company to provide broadcasting services in 1949. That was the birth of the Jamaica Broadcasting Company, which, it must be noted, was a subsidiary of the London-based Re-diffusion Group. However, in 1950 ZQI was taken over by the JBC and commercial broadcasting began under the call sign, Radio Jamaica and the Re-diffusion Network. RJR cometh! And so too did the community gathering posts for listening to broadcasts.

I mention this because, community gatherings have always been a concrete manifestation of the transforming ICTs in our country. Importantly, they were also an integral part of the information and education of the Jamaican people and society. Commercial radio and public service radio though, would always be in contention – and as I have argued in my work in community media, genuine public service media cannot survive without subsidies in the same way commercial radio cannot survive without advertising. No matter the technology, it costs! The answer was always to be found in popularizing the content – making it local and relatable to the audiences, wherever they are through radio dramas, local music programmes, etc.

Of course, by 1959 the government decided to enter the broadcasting arena. JBC cometh. Norman Manley, the premier then, wanted to have in Jamaica what other national broadcasters such as the BBC were doing. The development of local content – drama, music, voice – and national development information and education took on new impetus and a full-scale diversification of broadcasting content had begun.

The growth of media platforms available also expanded with the introduction of television in August 1963 – on the first anniversary of independent Jamaica, and truly, the story of Independent Jamaica would also become the story of independent media. The shift from foreign ownership and content to local ownership and content and, of course, the growing debates and tension between the role of private, commercialized and public developmental media, and the role of journalists, reporters and media workers in serving private interest or shaping the nation.

All of this push and pull between State, private and public imperatives was always layered on top of the transforming technologies and how these new technologies could be used in transforming our people – politically, socially, culturally. The informational and educational value – what I call, the instructional and directional value of media – was always of primary concern. So it was in the early development of media. So it remained over the centuries, and particularly over the decades of our independence. So it is today.

### **The dilemma of new ICTs and freedom of the press.**

The ease of access to the new technologies that aid not only the generation of news but also places its dissemination into the hands of too many ‘ordinary’ folks is a problem. Many of these new media content creators, influencers, and information generators themselves have no care about the tenets of journalism – ethics, legality, the elements of news – proximity, responsibility, credibility – the importance of context, the agenda setting functions of news media, etc. Most of those who are generating new information and unleashing it on the world in the moment – IG style – are merely feeding into the instant gratification that drives human reality and anxieties.

And, even those professional journalists and newsrooms that lift the stories from this base in the name of expediency – first, fast, fact-check later – in the cause of popularity, and defending the people’s right to information are not themselves any more caring about the developmental role of media, of news, of the press!

I want to locate this very brief part of my discussion on the modern incarnation of citizen journalism in a 2012 article by Dr Corrine Barnes, senior lecturer at the Caribbean School of Communication at the University of the West Indies, Mona campus. In the article entitled, *Citizen Journalism vs. Traditional journalism: A case for collaboration*, Barnes states,

*“The idea behind citizen journalism is that people without professional or formal training in journalism have an opportunity to use the tools of modern technology and the almost limitless reach of the Internet in order to create content that would not otherwise be revealed, as this form of journalism goes far beyond the reach of traditional journalism”*

The article continues,

*“Citizen Journalism, or participatory journalism as it is alternately labelled, is the act of a citizen or group of citizens involved in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and other forms of information.”* (Caribbean Quarterly Vol 58, No.2/3, June – September 2012).

I will deal with two main points of interest at this time. The first is that this very much sounds like the evolution of journalism full stop. New technologies and ease of access to such are forever behind the changing ways in which people present or represent the news and major issues affecting the society. Put another way, the transformation of our communities, our country, our world, is in



direct relation to the evolution of information technologies, who access, and how they are accessed and used.

The easier it is for the technologies to be in the hands of who we consider regular people – ordinary people – the more they are going to use it to present themselves and represent their communities, unfiltered by established standards. Community, or citizen, or participatory, people journalism will never go away, and thankfully so, because it is a fundamental part of what makes for freedom of the press. However, we must be ever mindful of the point, the purpose, and the limits of the constitutive norms that provide protections for that freedom.

The second point of interest here for me is that though we have brought some focus to citizen journalism in the context of increased use of Internet platforms to generate news, such as is seen with Twitter, for example, it still very much matters that our main news sources remain credible, objective, fact-based generators of news and information. In other words, while people are happy for the “breaking news” phenomenon, journalistic integrity still matters. And that is why I say, it is unfortunate that even though news rooms in the region continue to punch more on the right side of fairness and accuracy, there is still a very strong perception that we are not doing enough investigative work in the media.

Why do I say it is unfortunate? Because, over the last 60 years we have seen the evidence in Jamaica that there are more people available with the requisite skillset to do serious investigative work; increased training institutions preparing people for professional practice; and growing intolerance for fake media. The evidence is clear that there are people trained and educated at varying levels and in various related fields to get the news right – be that in straight news reporting or in opinion news – people the likes of Gary Allen and Cliff Hughes; the likes of a Canute James – who worked with the Financial Times before returning to teach at CARIMAC and has the most fascinating stories of the depth at which one has to sometimes bury oneself to get to the truth; the likes of Earl Moxam – whose *Vantage Point Jamaica: A Reporter's Chronicle* should be a must read for all journalism students; and the likes of a Dionne Jackson Miller – whose commitment to journalism and being a journalist is just simply phenomenal.

Everybody who knows me know that I could not work in news. I could not work in news because I am the one who will always be looking for the other side. No matter how many sides have already been covered or uncovered, I still believe there is another perspective yet to be tackled. This means that it is more likely for my story to not see the pages of the newspaper or be broadcast at a time at which the interest of the public is prime. Ironically, it is in defense of the public's interest why we must not stop until we are indeed at the whole truth. The public has a right to objectivity in as much as it has a right to the truth.

The pursuit of the truth, the desire to go beyond the headlines, is an unending uncomfortable but necessary state of perpetual digging, or climbing, or hurdling, or sidestepping, but with one singular

goal in mind – to guarantee that the information upon which you have constructed your understanding of the world around you is factual!

So even if you are not fully there yet, it is in the public's interest to take them on that journey with you, to let them know where you are, how you are doing, what obstacles are thrown in your way, what doors are being opened – even if it is a leak – who are you speaking with or who is not speaking with you, why you are doing what is being done and why you still need to go even deeper, even farther with a story. But the journey must remain grounded in the facts always – even if it is a misstep, declare it. And when it comes to declaring, journalists must be prepared to declare their biases if in fact they are committed to journaling the truth.

Dionne Jackson-Miller represents all of that for me. In that representation stands a symbol of commitment to journalistic integrity. Integrity speaks to a kind of disdain for favors and bribes. Integrity speaks to a kind of courage that keeps you going to places where the ordinary would not go. Integrity speaks to being objective in holding the powerful to account.

The ability to raise the issues, speak truth to power – however that power is defined and wherever that power resides – and to make it understandable by the common folk, as well as by Kings, is empowering, not just for those who have been voiceless, but also for those whose dominant voice is also tempered by that ability – not hardened nor muted – but adjusted closer to the truth, aligned closer to the voice of the people – and we know what they say about *vox populi* – and echoing closer to the principles of fairness and justice.

As Barnes asserts in the referenced article,

*“Issues of objectivity, balance and fairness are of fundamental importance in traditional journalism.... Journalists are required to be professional and meticulous in their information-gathering process to ensure the **veracity** of their information. Confirmation and re-confirmation of information is the **hallmark** of professional journalism... No media entity wants to have its **credibility** put on the line by being sued for libel... Professional journalists are usually trained and are aware of the guidelines governing their product.”*

This exercise is not about a single individual journalist, but I am confident that Lester Spaulding would not have been disappointed in my saying that DJMiller's journalistic punch is unparalleled and that it is in these kinds of stories and recognition on a day like today that his legacy of media as a tool for development of society is carried on. His legacy of media as defending the rights of the people is enriched. His legacy of excellence in media are elevated.

### **The lived experience in media**

I am a child of the sixties. My early developmental years would have been lived through radio and newspaper and to a lesser extent television. These were the order of the day. Reading was critical then. The ability to read aloud and with understanding so that those in the community who could

not read could also hear what was written in the news was a big thing! Gathering around a radio set for the news and, just as importantly, for the stories, was par for the course.

The debates that follow, even among those who were not literate, were amazing in their validation of how having voice mattered and therefore, how truth and facts mattered to public understanding and public discourse around critical developmental issues. Issues of politics. Social and economic issues. Cultural identity issues.

The new independent Jamaica meant something to our people, especially those who would have come through the riots of the 1930's, adult suffrage in the 1940's, representative politics in the 1950's, the attempts at federation as a region and the subsequent lowering of the British flag and hoisting of local flags – including Jamaica's black green and gold – in the early 60's.

For those who could not be physically present in any particular moment of history in the making, it was the radio and the intelligence and brilliant imaginations of the broadcaster who made it real – and even for those watching on black and white television to have a sense of colour in the pageantry and celebration of being a Nation! The political and cultural shifts taking place in Jamaica and across the Caribbean were fashioned and burned in the minds of a people through a growing and evolving mediascape.

As a country our leaders must be careful not let the fear of a ghost from the federal past overcome the current discourse about constitutional reform and the extent and levels at which the people should participate in the process. I urge you to let the federalist monkey off your backs and engage with the people, this time, about how they wish to see Jamaica governed. In my humble view, there is no evidence that either the media and communication systems of the State or private enterprise have really failed us. Mediated communication in our country has always been of the highest sophistication and is yet to be a disaster or disservice to the development of this country.

Surely, there have been times when our partisanship would have us see and hear things that are not of our ideological, philosophical, or political liking; but it was always in those times of great contestation that media was supreme in helping its people to appreciate the value of logical reasoning and debate (logos); the importance of public discourse in developing trust (social capital) in those who seek to convince us that their way is the appropriate ways in which humanity could negotiate life (ethos); and importantly, the significance of emotional intelligence in developing tolerance, and patience, and understanding of the human condition and how we may agitate for change (pathos).

Communication is the process by which all societies develop meaning, understanding, identity and agency and we must never attempt to discredit the process nor perpetuate the idea that it is sufficient to simply disseminate information and let it diffuse among the people. Leaders – political,

religious, corporate, civil society – who believe in transformation and empowerment must never be afraid to engage!

One of the first critical pieces I wrote in my *Writing for News* course at Carimac was on the statement usually attributed to the American newspaper man, Philip Graham: *News is the first draft of history!* What the late president and publisher of the Washington Post was “journalism is the first rough draft of history”. In other words, it was journalists who were responsible for the written, oral, or visual documentation of life’s events as they unfold. Later through analysis, observation, and understanding these moments in time, these events, take on significance and lower case history, as society evolving, becomes upper case History, the study of, the chronicling of the human experience as social beings and special phenomena in particular geographies.

Press freedom is about accountability. The level of public literacy – our ability to read and write as well as to understand the highest forms of concepts and expressions – are all a reflection of how much media in general, and journalism in particular, are allowed to freely seek, analyze, synthesize, and present the realities and conditions that most affect the society. The pace, nature, and success of our development agenda has direct relation to the pace, nature and success of our news media. The sophistication of our reporters and journalists’ best thrives in an environment where objectivity is revered, where there is no fear in seeking, finding and announcing truth, and where partisanship – political, cultural, corporate – all forms of partisanship are condemned, shunned, abhorred. These are values that made Lester Spaulding the giant he was!

Press freedom is also about sustainability. Lester Spaulding was the captain of a ship that was under foreign ownership, government ownership, and mass-based organizations’ ownership and took it finally through to public listing with broad-based ownership of stocks. Given that we often see press freedom in direct relation to government control, I want to posit that a major impact of globalization and the economic culture of globalization in particular was the privatization of media, especially in developing countries such as Jamaica. The way this happened in Jamaica was not without its challenges, but credit to the governments of the day that were responsible for transitioning its State media systems to independent media systems.

Of course, one of the effects of economic globalization and privatization is the increased consolidation of media in the hands of a few. It is a worldwide phenomenon. The idea of a global big-6 world media ownership still exist despite the increased diversity across media systems. We have seen that in Jamaica as well. People can relate to when RJR finally took over the main JBC broadcast systems in the 1990’s but what is probably more reflective of the giant in whose name this lecture is being held, is how he captained the process, how he directed and fashioned the evolution of the Radio 1, Radio 2 and Television stations into the fold of credibility and independence for which the RJR brand had become respected.

Press freedom also demands, as Spaulding's legacy so clearly underscores that as critical leaders in the shaping of a nation media workers and journalists must remain consistent to credibility, and unwavering in their commitment to independence in journalistic endeavour. It is also an imperative to appreciate that press freedom demands what the legacy of Lester Spaulding echoes, independence in your management of the media and communication systems.

That is why, I unreservedly place the reflections of Gary Allen, CEO of the RJR-Gleaner group in the public space. According to Allen,

*"Spaulding held a consistent position that you can only be an independent and successful media business IF we can pay our own way. We must therefore be viable and profitable".*

Hence, Allen continues,

*"He always pushed for all managers to understand the business and manage it as a business that specializes in independent and credible news".*

The inextricable symbiosis between independence and credibility in media.

When one has played such a significant role in ensuring that Jamaicans, the people, not only take control of their own resources, but develop the capacity to manage those resources in such a way that they remain sustainable, independent and central to people's development, it speaks volume to the measure of the man. It also speaks volume to the individual responsibility all media workers have in defending and preserving freedom of the press.

Press freedom is about innovation – not just technological but intellectual – how we for example, develop stories that support the development agenda, that challenge the authorities, that motivate a people to find itself, to speak up and out on issues to do with governance, integrity, responsibility, the human condition. When the real research is done and the real stories are told, the anecdotal tales about how people feel a sense of pride and belonging and empowerment from hearing themselves on radio, seeing themselves in print, or in the visual formats will validate the importance of a free independent and innovative press to the development of our country.

Independent Jamaica must still be thankful that even where there is a falloff in the ranking, we are blessed with top flight journalists and media workers, managers and owners across all the media groups who believe in and continue to defend people's freedoms and rights and the advancement of a democratic society. Theirs' are the shoulders upon which those who are being trained at The University of the West Indies, University of Technology-Jamaica, Northern Caribbean University, International Caribbean University, and University of the Commonwealth Caribbean will stand to guarantee the sustainability of, and commitment to, a free press and democratic Jamaica.

## Conclusion

Jamaica's independence and independent media are symbiotically linked. As long as those who own and practice in an open free and independent mediascape continue to fervently pursue truth and uphold journalistic integrity, our appetite for fairness and justice and our defense of the public's interest will always be safe! Media and communication systems provide instruction and direction for the development of society. We cannot let that responsibility fall from us. If we do, then we are in the business of digging our graves not building a nation.

I close with three final calls:

1. News rooms, media production studios, journalists and producers must remain vigilant. Do not, for example, ignore a government's public call for an investigation into leaks to the media which we know happens all over the world. Your right to protect your source could be at risk. Your advocacy and activism for reviewing and updating the Access to Information and Defamation Acts could be compromised.
2. In as much as things are generally OK in the Jamaican space, please, do not be afraid to stand with the international community in condemning the killing of journalists and media workers around the world. Today I stand with the UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay in her condemnation of the killing of journalist Ricot Jean in the town of Saint Marc, Haiti on April 25
3. Finally, I encourage all of us, if you have not yet done so, to take a critical look at Roy Wood Junior's presentation at the recently held White House Correspondence Dinner. For those who only see him as a comedian or as he says, a fake reporter on a fake news show, or for those in the habit of dismissing comedians as not serious about anything, I say to you, even if you skip the first 19 minutes of roasting, please hear his words in the last 6 or so minutes as the trained journalist in him speaks about the value of education, the value of collaboration and community, the value of advocacy, the value of objectivity, truth, credibility and integrity, and the value of respect for journalists and media workers to the maintenance of press freedom and the advancement of democracy and good governance.

And, on that point of advancing democracy and good governance, I turn to a statement from the 2021 Media Law Handbook for Southern Africa – Volume 1 for closing comment:

“(The) role of media as advocate for democracy and good governance is controversial because it envisages the press as both advocate and impartial reporter. In this role, the press comments on issues of the day and advocates improved democratic practices and good governance. In this advocacy role, the press sees itself firmly on the side of the ordinary citizen, whose life can be improved or worsened depending on how public authority is exercised. This advocacy role is also closely linked to the watchdog role of the press; however, it goes further. The press as an advocate will report not only on what is happening but on what should be happening. The press in many developing countries is almost forced

to play this role because improving basic human living conditions cannot happen without democratic practices and good governance.”

**Patrick Prendergast**

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