

Today, World Press Freedom Day (WPFD), we in the press recall those of our media colleagues and the family members of media workers in Jamaica who have been cut down or injured in the continuing crime and violence which media take no pleasure in reporting from day to day.

These crimes and this violence that have sometimes been threatened against media houses, sometimes committed against media workers and sometimes visited upon their families, smear the country's reputation for strong press freedom and tolerance to free speech, but more importantly puts a chill on journalists vigorously pursuing information on behalf of the public. This must not be allowed to continue.

The commendable move to review the country's defamation laws and the undertaking of the required review of the Access To Information Laws have disappointingly slowed down and seem stalled in review committees in our parliament.

Hence, another year has passed and a person in Jamaica can still be sent to prison for the spoken word, and the modernising of defamation laws to assist in encouraging transparency and accountability in public life, remain dreams of our profession.

In more recent time's discussions about a licensing regime for journalists remains a worrying prospect as the struggle continues to determine how to achieve ultimate freest movement of media workers in the fledgling Caribbean Single Market

More worrying for broadcast media in Jamaica is the unprecedented move within any Commonwealth and Caribbean country by local authorities to unilaterally introduce on local radio and television stations ten times a day, the government's own news, called GOJ New and a feature called GOJ News Update.

As Commonwealth Broadcasters meeting in South Africa recently agreed, such a move would see Jamaican standing alone in the British Commonwealth with measure that would impact editorial integrity and business sustainability.

The MAJ makes an appeal today for strong, clear and definitive action by the authorities to tackle crime and violence not just against media workers and their families, wherever it has happened, but to benefit the average Jamaican citizen.

We implore the authorities to make this the last World Press Freedom Day that media operate under oppressive defamation and poor access to information laws.

We appeal to the authorities to abandon the government ten times a day news headline plan and meet with commercial broadcasters to seek a workable plan

Finally, we implore our journalists to heighten their responsibility and develop their skills to meet the demands of an increasingly demanding and astute viewing reading and listening public.