



**Statement by Senator, the Honourable Simon Stiell
Minister for Information, Climate Resilience, Environment, Forestry,
Fisheries and Disaster Management
September 18, 2019**

A lot has been made in recent days about a number of instances which have led, in some quarters, to a debate about media freedom in Grenada. There will always be a healthy debate in the public space about many issues; however, the policy of this Government, relative to freedom of the media, has been long and consistent.

We may not always be right, but we are always clear - freedom of the media, and the deepening of the rights of the people are of paramount importance. These are the rights that we have sought to further entrench by our proposal for constitutional review, which remains an unresolved debate.

In an earlier term, this Government drafted proposals for a Freedom of Information Act and a stated Media Rights Policy, both of which were rejected by the Media Workers Association at the time. The association was subsequently invited to draft its own document for consideration but to date, a draft has not been shared with Government. At this juncture, we renew that invitation for a draft Freedom of Information Act and Media Rights Policy.

Notwithstanding, Government proceeded, without condition, to open up the media industry. It was also the New National Party administration that voluntarily divested its majority interest in what was a state-owned media company. Indeed, Grenada is the only country in the Eastern Caribbean – and only one of two in the entire Caribbean Community -- without an official state-owned station – radio or television. Prime Minister Dr. Keith Mitchell initiated the privatisation of the then Grenada Broadcasting Corporation, in spite of skepticism by his own colleagues.

The policy of this Government remains that the media in Grenada MUST and SHOULD continue to operate under the absolute freedom that the law allows – its own rights being matched by its inherent responsibility to demonstrate accuracy, fairness and balance.

In some situations, as happens everywhere in the world, there may be robust debate and contention among reporters and Government officials; but this natural tension should not be seen for more than what it is. A reporter, an official, or private citizen – everyone - has a right to their views on any topic, without the other party regarding it as a threat to their own freedom or a challenge to their responsibility.

As the elected administration, we understand that we have an even further and deeper responsibility to openness and scrutiny, because, this is simply how democracy works best. A clash of styles in any situation, should not be interpreted as anything more than that. And worse yet, it must not be interpreted as policy. Additionally, disagreement should never lead to hostility. In this social media-driven environment, there is also a danger to over analyse every incident in private and public life.

Grenada's practicing journalists can probably attest that today, they have more access to Government officials than at any other time in history. Generally speaking, reporters are in no way limited to the questions they ask. In relation to the weekly Post Cabinet Press Briefings, like with every situation, there is a management challenge because of time, and the desire to give as many reporters as possible, the opportunity to ask their questions. Some reporters, by the nature of their personality, and sometimes their experience, are more forceful than others, and without meaning any harm, may end up taking more time, leaving other reporters without an opportunity to ask their own questions.

We have listened to practicing journalists, who had previously complained about the poor management of some of the Government organised media events – and their own lack of opportunity to ask the questions that they wanted. It was in this context that we have been exploring ways to make the exercise fairer, more reasonable and accommodating to all – and this will always be a work in progress.

In relation to the matter reported about the Minister of State, with responsibility for Information – we are satisfied through our investigations,

including talking to reporters – that there was absolutely no physical altercation. What has been reported on social media has grossly misrepresented the truth and has unfortunately led to comments and concerns by members of civil society, purported to be based on fact, when this is not the case. It is interesting to note, that to date, none of the traditional news channels in Grenada have reported what was put out on social media. Have we stopped to ask why, or have we simply rushed to judgment?

Government accepts responsibility for not adding clarity to this matter up until now, because our investigations revealed that what was stated in social media was not predicated on an actual occurrence. There is no doubt that there was a disagreement about perceived style and approach in the overall context of the situation at the time, but the investigation was clear that there was no altercation. It is important to note that the Senior Minister, from whom a response was being sought, proposed to accommodate the question in spite of the ongoing disagreement between the reporter and the Junior Minister. It is our hope that this further elucidates our position on media engagement. Government, as a whole, reaffirms its commitment to open and constant engagement with the media, and by extension, the general public.