

**Remarks by Cordel Green  
Executive Director of  
the Broadcasting Commission - Jamaica  
At  
The Book Launch of  
“Media & Violence in Jamaica”  
May 5, 2010  
U.W.I.**

**(These views are not necessarily those of the  
Broadcasting Commission)**

Distinguished members of faculty, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to begin by referencing a statement from delegates at an International Seminar On: Violence, Media and Challenges of Modern Societies held in 2002 and organized by the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD). The delegates said:

The view that violence can be exorcised from human society is romantic and naive and masks the danger of totalitarian dominance. In a realistic view, violence is not going to disappear from our world. Thus, the objective lies in how to cope with conflict and manage disjuncture to suit society in the new millennium.

we know that the new millennium society is being shaped by technology, particularly new media and social networking technologies, that have altered social norms (so, learning how to make a bomb is no longer taboo because the instructions are freely available on the Internet, and like Ricky Trooper

you can make your version of a short film glorifying violence and post it on YouTube).

We also know that there is a values gap between old media and new media socialisation. So that attitudes toward the portrayal of violence, may well vary across the population based upon the different value orientations.

We might also agree that the fragmented nature of newer media, patterns a fragmented society in which the emergence of diverse 'community values', challenges the formulation of broader 'public' or 'national' standards and consensus around values.

It is against this background, and accepting the tremendous influencing power of media, as a matter beyond dispute, that we are required to interrogate whether the traditional reportage on violence is helping our fragmented society to manage disjuncture and cope with conflict, on the one hand, or having the undesirable numbing effect or what has been described as a pervasive culture of free-floating fear, on the other.

I submit that there is an imbalance in favour of numbness and fear. This is because media content is

rarely about explaining the context of violence, analyzing patterns or providing options for solutions. So, the collective knowledge of our community, at the highest quotient, is about heinous acts of violence, and at the lowest quotient about solutions and coping with conflict.

In other words, our media have provided sufficient and adequate information about acts of violence, where they occur, how frequently they occur and an accurate interpretation of Jamaica as a violent country.

The task now is to focus attention on how to change Jamaica, and this requires not only an activist media but also media which is socialised to habitually think in a new civic sense, unconstrained by the commercial ethos - "if it bleeds it leads".

One area of concern is the insidious link between violence, suffering and grief in media portrayals. Sometimes it gets too close to being disrespectful, insensitive and exploitative when too much attention is focused on ordinary people, at times of suffering and grief. The scenes of dead and injured victims, grieving relatives and histrionics by eye witnesses, make for "gripping content" and

what marketing experts call "arousal". But it is this aspect of the treatment of violence which can be most dangerous and requires great caution and far more emotional maturity and discretion.

In this regard, the Broadcasting Commission has already made recommendations to government for new regulations requiring broadcast licensees to:

- i. take all reasonable steps to treat trauma survivors and/or traumatised relatives in a manner which preserves their dignity and is not harmful to their mental and physical well being;
- ii. not interview child survivors of, or witnesses to, traumatic events without the express permission of a parent or guardian;
- iii. take due care over the physical and emotional welfare and the dignity of people under eighteen who take part or are otherwise involved in programmes. This is irrespective of any consent given by the participant or by a parent, guardian or other person over the age of eighteen in loco parentis.

- iv. Ensure no transmissions that condone or encourage hostility or violence against individuals or specific minorities and social groups, including those based on gender, sexual orientation and disability.

But rules are one thing; compliance as a measure of commitment, is another. And as Professor Barry Chevannes has said on occasion, "once you mandate something, then it is in our interest to sabotage it, and we Jamaicans have had great experience in sabotaging things.

The preferred approach therefore is one in which the media, on its own volition, preferably through the adoption of a voluntary code of ethics, commit to reshaping Jamaica's internal narrative about violence. This demands continuous reflection by the media of itself, as also a shifting away from coverage of violence to raise levels of awareness to an activist engagement in order to raise levels of consciousness among the society at large, the central objectives being the capacity to cope with conflict and manage disjuncture.