

**Speaking Notes for Senator The Hon. Ruel Reid**  
**Minister in the Ministry of Education, Youth and**  
**Information**

**For, Broadcasting Commission's Operational**  
**Planning Retreat -2018**

**The Treehouse –Hope Zoo –Old Hope Road,**  
**Kingston 6**

**October 25-26, 2018**

**9:00 am**

## **SALUTATION**

Ladies and gentlemen, the pleasure is mine to address this important gathering in a space conducive to having stakeholders inform the Commission's ongoing processes, geared towards renewing and positioning itself for the challenges of a different age, given the considerations and realities of media today. As always I know you are seized of the importance of carrying out your functions, balancing the interests of citizens, vulnerable audiences, media operators, advertisers and the creative community. Our responsibilities

ladies and gentlemen are massive given the ubiquitous nature of media. In today's media landscape, some have even argued that certain media are more pervasive than others. Ladies and gentlemen, in a real sense, these are the best of times and the worst of times for media. There are those who argue that media have been totally democratised ... social media in particular, it is said has toppled significant walls of privilege.

Some say that the power of social media is its composition and the utilisation of language which is representative of the ordinary or common person. Simultaneously, there is the argument that the proliferation of media, has resulted in unprecedented misinformation and disinformation. *Wherever your view rests, the fact is - we are where we are and not where we were!*

Many of you may remember that for the better part of thirty-years Jamaica had two radio stations, the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation (JBC) and Radio Jamaica Rediffusion (RJR). Today, we have over 29.

Some of you may be old enough to remember when, for the better part of thirty years, we also

had one television station, which for nearly two decades signed off at midnight. Some of our young people might laugh, if we told them that there was a time when television in Jamaica did not operate for 24 continuous hours. Today, we have two operational national free-to-air television stations and perhaps far more cable channels per capita than many places in the world. We have also seen the vast transformation that has occurred in the print media ... we indeed have come a mighty long way.

Ladies and gentlemen, looking forward, I believe local media will flourish over the coming years. Unlike some, I don't believe further liberalisation and market segmentation will sound the death knell of Jamaican culture. More media simply creates more opportunities to showcase our own culture, while we are *exposed* to other cultures. What I believe we have to continue to do however, is foster regulatory frameworks that encourage media which places a premium on the promotion of local culture and content. I foresee that many bright Jamaican entrepreneurs will find additional creative

ways to enhance this objective. Media scholar Marshall McLuhan, coined the term “global village.” We cannot escape that reality. There is no curtain of any material that may be put up to stymie the omnipresent qualities of 21<sup>st</sup> Century media.

A healthy mix of market forces, self-regulation and conscientious legal frameworks I believe to be the best referees, as local media continues to expand with new players catering to particular niches.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is an important question that we all need to contemplate, especially given the function of this Commission:

What is the future of media ownership in Jamaica? Mergers, acquisitions and takeovers, sometimes hostile, are now transforming media landscapes all over the world. Since 2000, we have seen the merger of several global media giants such:

- AOL-Time Warner (2000) \$162 Billion.
- AT&T-Time Warner (announced in 2016) \$85 Billion.
- Comcast-AT&T Broadband (2001) \$72 Billion.
- Charter-Time Warner Cable-Bright House (2016) \$65.5 Billion.

- Viacom-CBS (2000) \$35.6 Billion.

Here in Jamaica there was the merger, some say marriage, involving the Gleaner and the RJR Communication Group in 2015. We are also seeing where another major local print medium has expanded into the electronic landscape.

Some are of the view that this does not augur well in the local media landscape. Some have even gone further to say recent local media mergers are retrograde moves that will concentrate media ownership in a small group and thereby reduce consumer choice and free expression. I understand the significance of these perspectives. Within this context the Commission has to ensure that all interests are protected adequately.

My friends, Jamaica's media landscape will certainly continue to expand over the coming years. Literally dozens of our citizens have created businesses and careers out of media and related industries. As a Commission you have to ensure that the numerous stakeholders are confident that the Commission is

looking out for their best individual and collective interests.

I commend the work of the Commission to date and the role it plays and must continue to play in public education around the “Digital Economy”. Your presence on television and in cinemas is an important strategy to highlight the power and perils of the digital age; preserve privacy as appropriate; and to promote responsible and innovative use of technology by our citizenry, *on the path to sustained prosperity*. I welcome your investment in training team members in new areas, to increase your capacity for evidence based and responsive regulation.

The Broadcasting Commission has served ably as the Secretariat to the hard working National Digital Televisions Switchover Committee over the last decade. All stakeholders present and other representatives of the Committee, have, through hard work taken us to this critical decision making point. The Minister has signalled that the consultative process, characterised by transparency and inclusiveness, will end within this Fiscal Year.

We have asked the Spectrum Management Authority and the Broadcasting Commission to conclude the final technical analysis, which together with all contributions, will form the basis for a submission to Cabinet within this Fiscal Year. Their current work focuses on matters such as:

1. maximising the use of spectrum in the Digital Switch Over;
2. options for a multiplex operator(s), with a focus on spectrum capacity and special consideration of existing Free To Air operators and the PBCJ;
3. the maximum Standard Definition and High Definition channels which can be made available from a technical standpoint; and
4. possible accommodation of any market driven decisions to carry digital radio (as distinct from mandating a Digital Switch Over for radio).

As you are aware, the Electronic Media and Content Policy has been crafted and taken through the approval tiers of the Ministry from 2016. A broad sweep of very necessary and transformational changes were put forward, consequent on

comprehensive research and our extensive consultation with you, our stakeholders. The points which have remained unsettled, have included the matter of the Digital Switch Over and, internal to Government, the institutional framework for regulating the industry. We are essentially at the midpoint in this Financial Year and strategically, a decision will have to be taken now, as to whether we will have to progress to legislative amendments which reflect the policy recommendations for which consensus has been achieved. For example, amending the legislation to provide for a new definition of broadcasting; introducing at minimum, enabling powers for the Minister and the Regulator to treat with Digital Switch Over, and all other matters which we have agreed is ripe for advancement.



Ladies and gentlemen, these are exciting times for media in Jamaica. Jamaica is looking to us for informed direction and leadership. Let's continue to earn their trust by ensuring that all our operations are founded on integrity and our strategic focus, is trained on serving the public interest and creating an enabling environment for the growth of this Industry.

Thank You!