



# **World Press Freedom Day Debate, 2019**

## **Activity Summary Report**

**MEDIA, YOUTH & CULTURE COMMITTEE**

SIXTH ASSEMBLY  
May 2019

**The Chairperson of the Media, Youth & Culture Committee submits, on behalf of the Committee its Activity Summary Report on the World Press Freedom Day Debate, 2019:**

Hon. Gervais Henrie

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**Chairperson**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

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1. **Introduction.....Page 3**

2. **Summarized Points of Debate.....Page 3-5**

3. **Invitation List & Members Present.....Page 6**

4. **Recommendations & Conclusion.....Page 6-7**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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The Media, Youth & Culture Committee (MYCC) of the National Assembly hosted a debate in the Lobby to commemorate World Press Freedom Day 2019 on Friday 3rd May, under the theme of *'the role of media in elections and democracy'*. The theme endeavours to encourage discussion and promote understanding and awareness about current challenges to the role of the media during elections. The Debate was moderated by the Director of the Office of the Speaker, Mrs. Genevieve Morel.

The objectives of the Debate was to position the MYCC as a meaningful voice in debates concerning key media related issues on a national level; to foster an environment of healthy debates and analysis with external stakeholders; build a presence that is driven by fair and transparent processes and procedures; and that values accountability and diversity of expression; as well as connect the institution further with Civil Society & the Media.

**Debate Theme:** *What is the role of the local media in multi-party elections?*

The Media are essential to democracy, and a democratic election – acting as a crucial watchdog. In order to fulfill their roles, the media need to maintain a high level of professionalism, accuracy in their coverage, as well as adhere to laws and regulations relating to the fundamental freedoms essential to democracy; including freedom of information, expression and participation. As well as being watchdogs the media also have crucial roles of educating voters; reporting on developments of the election campaigns; providing a platform for the public to communicate their concerns and opinions; reporting on the results; scrutinize the electoral process; and help to prevent election-related violence.

The numerous ways in which the media ensure democratic electoral processes fall into the below categories:

- 1) *Media as a transparency/watchdog*
- 2) *Media as a campaign platform*
- 3) *Media as an open forum for debate and discussions/also as a public voice*
- 4) *Media as a public educator*

The Media Committee endeavours to address pressing challenges relating to the role of the Media during elections, as well as their role in democracy as a whole; and discuss ways of strengthening journalism as a central factor in building fair, responsible and inclusive societies.

## 2. Summary Points of the Debate

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The debate took place in the Lobby of the National Assembly and was filmed by both SBC and Telesesel, and was recorded by Radio Sesel. Th extensive media coverage provided great visibility for the Committee and have increased the engagement of the public.

The below general points were highlighted during the debate:

### **Challenges of Journalism During Elections**

Political Print Media present expressed that they feel that there are restrictions and there is freedom for them to promote their presidential candidates and political ethos of the party.

Representatives from media outlets expressed concerns over the lack of understanding of legal boundaries, including defamation amongst journalism and it was highlighted that this could be a deterrent to more investigative reporting.

The lack of laws protecting whistleblowers was also flagged as a concern.

The working hours and low salaries for journalists was also flagged as a component of why journalists maybe do not investigate subjects further, as well as the under staffed media outlets.

### **The Crucial Role of the Media During Elections**

It was also highlighted that the role of the Media is crucial in generating information and debate, as well as as being a watchdog and public educator. But it was asked as to whether the local media are ready to take on these roles fully?

It was brought forward that elections are not static but a dynamic cycle that never ends and that the media plays a role on keeping that cycle going and this would involve analysis, as well as promoting debate and access to information to keep elected politicians accountable.

It was brought forward that the Media and not only the Electoral Commission should put in place educational campaigns during and after elections for the public to better understand their role.

It was highlighted that the media landscape has changed over the years with the presences of more and more media outlets, in addition it was also discussed that the 2020 Presidential Elections will be very interesting as the presence of more private media outlets will provide unregulated coverage for candidates.

### **Gap In Political Reporting & Investigative Journalism**

The percentage of voters actually looking at policies and their impact to inform who they vote for was also discussed and it was highlighted that the media has a crucial role to play to educate the public and bring to light more facts so that citizens make more informed decisions during elections. This also brought into questions of how policies and political themes are being portrayed to the public.

There was a call for more independent media and for more investigative journalism.

It was highlighted that more televised debates should take place for citizens to be better informed of the goals and objectives of candidates, as well as promoting more multi stakeholder discussions on issues.

### **The Ownership & Financing of Media Houses**

The question of 'who owns newspapers?' was highlighted and as businesses and political parties have the biggest share this can create barriers in press freedom and highlights a need for more analysis into the ownership of media houses and their impact on the press and the information that is provided to citizens.

How media ownership and can be regulated was also questioned.

It was expressed that the financing of media houses has an impact on press freedom and whether there should be limits on ownership of the media.

### **Lack of Human Resource & Political Analysts**

It was highlighted that there is currently a lack of trained journalists and political analysts for more investigative journalism to take place.

There was a call for more training for journalists on investigative journalism and political reporting.

### **Cooling off Period is Problematic**

There isn't a clear framework on how the cooling off period affects private and commercial media houses. It was highlighted that the cooling off period is a barrier and very problematic for journalists as the advantage goes to the incumbent.

### **Need for Reformed Laws & Regulations**

It was discussed that the electoral laws do not make provisions for the private media houses and the growing number of media outlets that will cover elections.

The criminal defamation laws also act as a deterrent for Journalists to investigate further or write controversial articles, as well as the lack of laws protecting whistleblowers.

It was discussed that more multi-stakeholder meetings to discuss gaps in laws and regulations should take place.

## **3. Invitation List & Members Present**

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### **Members Present:**

Hon. Gervais Henrie (Chairperson of Committee)  
Hon. Flory Larue (Vice-Chairperson of Committee)  
Hon. Chantal Ghislain  
Hon. Jany De Letourdi  
Hon. Paul Ernesta

**Members Absent with apologies:** Hon. Wavel Woodcock & Hon. Simon Gill

**Invitation List:**

Organisation	Representative
1. Telesesel	Mr. Clive Camille
2. Le Seychellois	Ms. Lindy Vital
3. SBC	Ms. Georgette Hoareau
4. Today In Seychelles	Mr. Nelson Esparon
5. Nation	Ms. Elsie Pointe
6. The People & United Seychelles	Ms. Sheila Lafortune
7. LDS	Ms. Vesna Rakic
8. Seychelles Patriotic Movement	Mr. Alix Letourdie
9. The Seychelles Media Commission	Mr. Ibrahim Afif (CEO)
10. Public Ethics Officers of the Ethics Commission	Ms. Mina Crea (CEO)
11. Anti-Corruption Commission	Mr. Denis Joubert
12. ARID	Ms. Lucianne Sofola Ms. Winnie Baccarie
13. UNDP	Mr. Roland Alcindor Mrs. Preethi Nair
14. Citizens Democracy Watch	Ms. Eline Moses Ms. Tressy Dine Mr. Rodney Maria
15. CEPS	Ms. Mayra Matatiken
16. The Bar Association	Mr. Divino Sabino
17. PS of the Department of Information	Mr. Denis Rose
18. Transparency Initiative Seychelles	Mrs. Marie-France Watson
19. SBC Board Members	Mr. Gerard Lafortune (Chair of Board) Ms. Marie-Annette Ernesta (Board Member)
20. Seychelles National Youth Council	Ms. Penny Belmont
21. Seychelles Youth Assembly	Ms. Jeanette Ali Mr. Marlon Esparon (Speaker of SNYA)
22. Freelance Journalist	Ms. Sasha Lee-Marivel
23. Freelance Journalist & Secretary of AMPS	Ms. Patsy Athanase
24. Freelance Journalist	Ms. Kate Carolus

**4. Recommendations & Conclusion**

The Committee met on Wednesday the 22<sup>nd</sup> May to discuss feedback on the event and the below recommendations were brought forward:

**To Host the Next Debate at ICCS to Increase Public Participation**

The Committee received feedback from the public that the debate should be open. The Committee discussed that in 2020 the debate be organized at ICCS or a bigger venue in order for the public to participate and at the same time increase the visibility of the committee. It was discussed that Members of the Committee could also invite constituents to the debate.

**Talking Points & Questions for the Committee**

It was expressed that some Members of the Committee could not fully participate in the debate as it was solely focused on the media and it was recommended that going forward questions and talking points for the Members be provided in order to not only enrich the debate but also allow Members to also interact with the audience.

Overall the Committee were pleased with how the Debate turned out and wish to continue hosting this debate annually.