



5th Floor, Victoria Mutual Building,
53 Knutsford Boulevard,
Kingston 5
Jamaica, W.I.

ORAL SUBMISSIONS
BY CORDEL GREEN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE BROADCASTING
COMMISSION
BEFORE
SELECT COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT
ON HUMAN RESOURCES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
NOVEMBER 24, 2009

Committee Chairman, members of this parliamentary committee,
good morning.

At the outset I should say that the Broadcasting Commission's mandate is to regulate free to air television (of which there are 3), 22 free to air radio stations + and 34 subscriber television operators (cable).

Contrary to what many persons believe, the Commission does not regulate music on public transportation, public entertainment events such as dances, carnival and concerts, newspapers, satellite radio, Direct to Home (DTH Satellite television) or the Internet.

The concerns articulated by this Parliamentary Committee about the impact of certain types of songs, images and messages on youth, resonate with the Broadcasting Commission. In February of this year, the Commission found it necessary to issue three Directives, in response to a deluge of songs that were both explicitly sexual and violent in nature.

Those Directives of February 6 & 20 2009:

- ▶ Prohibit transmission of any recording, live song or music video which promotes and/or glorifies the use of guns or other offensive weapons;
- ▶ Prohibit transmission of any recording, live song or music video which promotes or glorifies any offence against the person such as murder, rape, mob violence and other offences such as arson.
- ▶ Prohibit transmission of any audio recording, song or music video which employs editing techniques of 'bleeping' or 'beeping' of its original lyrical content.

In the nine months since the Directives the Commission has carried out 33 investigations against 6 radio stations and 2 television stations. The affected stations have had to air

apologies, publish apologies in the daily newspapers and take internal actions, including suspension of on-air staff.

Early outcries of foul in some quarters, has slowly been replaced by welcomed compliance in others. There is also a noticeable improvement in the quality of songs and videos being produced for airplay. Perhaps what is more striking, are public comments by members of the entertainment industry that there is renewed creativity in how they are approaching their craft.

The seminal lesson is that we can bring about change in our society when leaders are prepared to forego short term popularity for the long term benefits of doing the right thing.

Despite the positive efforts we have seen by many artistes, it remains a matter of concern that there are elements of our music industry who threaten its viability and positive impact through tribalistic and vitriolic divisions, which is now playing itself out in the crassest ways in our schools and among young people.

What is referred to as the “Gaza/Gully phenomenon” is the latest addition to a “school to prison” pipeline which is rapidly under construction in Jamaica.

Construction material for this “school to prison” pipeline are trauma, stigma, exclusion, discrimination, low self-esteem, absentee parents, present but incapable parents, poisonous role models, sexual exploitation, sexual violence, failed institutions, normalisation of low standards, failed leadership, and a generally hostile environment.

These are precipitators of violent tendencies in children – and it is these tendencies that are being exploited by those whose lyrics promote, celebrate and validate acts of violence and criminality.

These developments are occurring against the background of unprecedented mass availability of information - far surpassing the age of print and electronic mass media of radio and television.

There are boundless opportunities to be heard, read and seen,

sometimes even without mediation. The best example of this being the Internet.

Media consumers ability to make their own decisions about content and how to treat it points to a different regulatory environment, in which regulation is less about “inoculation” and more about “empowerment” and “critical awareness.”

To date, the Broadcasting Commission’s response has been three-fold. Firstly, we have already embarked on a comprehensive review of media policy, which is taking account of new areas such as Internet Protocol Television (IPTV), Mobile TV and Satellite radio and television.

Secondly, the Commission has collaborated with UNESCO the Ministry of Education, and The Joint Board of Teacher Education, to launch a Media Literacy Project for Primary and Secondary Schools.

A 4 module video with supporting teachers' guide has been piloted in Teachers' Colleges and Primary Schools across the Island. The video and manual address issues such as :

- How media content is produced
- Portrayals of violence and sex
- Advertising
- How to use the Children's Code for Programming

Our vision is have full integration of media literacy training into the syllabus of all public schools island-wide under the portfolio of the Ministry of Education & Youth with support from partners like UNESCO.

Children in media literacy classes are expected to understand:

- Electronic media can be a useful tool for learning & self-development

- Some types of content can be harmful to children
- How to recognise inappropriate media content
- How to make informed decisions & respond to risky content in the media

The goal is to strengthen the critical abilities and communicative skills that give the individual's existence meaning, while promoting a well-oriented, democratic knowledge society.

The third plank of the Commission's response has been a Citizen's based monitoring Programme designed to engage willing Jamaicans in assisting the Commission with monitoring the 22 + radio stations and several television channels that are available through cable and over the air. During the period April to October 2009, the Commission trained 150 volunteer monitors from across the country.

We have also initiated and recommended to Government the formalization of a Local Content Production Fund. This fund is

designed to encourage the production of local content of high quality, which would be an alternative to the violence which is of concern to this committee and the country.

These are just some of the initiatives being embarked on by the Broadcasting Commission in playing its part to stem the rabid social decline which is afflicting Jamaica.

However, it will take much more to stem the flow. A cross-sectoral response is required and we welcome signs of this, particularly the recent action by the Transport Authority and the Police to address the problem of lewd music and pornography on our public passenger vehicles. More is needed!

The responsibility of government is to put together additional mitigation measures, to protect against any further degradation of the psyche and safety of Jamaicans, particularly our children. The strategy should include:

- Support for the Local Content Production Fund which has been recommended by the Broadcasting Commission.

- Building on the foundation of the Broadcasting Commission, to create a specialized and dedicated content regulator which would be responsible for the range of available content across traditional and non-traditional media.
- A legal mandate for the Broadcasting Commission to further develop and refine, a well-defined and structured programme of media literacy – to prepare people to participate in the new convergent culture, help them see how the media are shaping their understandings and help them to create, access and make informed value judgements about content, including music.
- Innovation in music training from preschool to post-secondary education, to enhance competence and critical assessment of music by our children and young people.
- A programme for tangible and high level public recognition of the several outstanding Jamaican artistes (vintage and

new) who have and continue to create music of hope and inspiration.

- Amendment of the Political Code of Conduct to make provision for proscribing music which is considered inappropriate for use at political rallies and in political campaigns.
- Parliamentary prohibition of the use of public funds or endorsement by government agencies which directly or indirectly supports those who create and/or promote gratuitously violent lyrics.