MEDIA RELEASE

15th Anniversary of the Parliament Channel
Your Partner In Democracy

Dear Media Colleagues,

On Wednesday 18th August 2021, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will commemorate the 15th Anniversary of the Parliament Channel. From its inception, the Parliament Channel has been the only Caribbean station broadcasting Parliamentary content 24 hours a day. As a result, it has been the public’s partner in democracy for the last 15 years.

Background History of the Parliament Channel

The story of the Parliament Channel began in 1989, when a Joint Select Committee of Parliament was appointed to consider and report on all aspects relating to the broadcasting and televising of the proceedings of Parliament. This Committee was established by separate motions passed on 28th April, 1989 in the House of Representatives and in the Senate on 2nd May, 1989. The first meeting of this Committee was held three weeks later when then House Speaker, Honourable Nizam Mohammed was unanimously elected as Chairman. At that meeting, the Committee reviewed precedents from other Commonwealth Parliaments where televising of proceedings had been introduced, namely the Parliaments of the United Kingdom, Canada and India. During that time, special arrangements were made from time to time for the live coverage of specific parliamentary events by then Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT). However, this arrangement was not without its challenges. The major one being that the logistics and programming of TTT did not allow for real time and full coverage of contributions of all Members of Parliament who participated in debates. Hence the need for a dedicated television station became more pressing.

The topic of live broadcasts of Parliamentary proceedings was again raised by then Opposition Senator Roi Kwabena in 1993 at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s Conference. During a panel discussion there was heated debate on the topic "Television Media Coverage and Parliament" chaired by a British MP delegate. Ten years later, on Tuesday 4th November, 2003, then Independent Senator Professor Ramesh Deosaran moved a Motion in the Senate calling on the “Government to arrange, with appropriate permission, for full debates and the business of both Houses to be transmitted to the public through the electronic media.”
Amendments were made and at a subsequent Sitting of the Senate in February 2004, the Motion that was approved included the appointment of a Joint Select Committee to report on this matter before 30th June, 2004. On 10th February, Senator Joan Yuille-Williams moved a motion to appoint six Senate members to serve on the Joint Select Committee. They were Senators Danny Montano, Christine Kangaloo, Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, Robin Montano, Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan and Mary King. The House of Representatives agreed to the same resolution a month later and appointed the following six Members to serve on the Committee: Dr. Keith Rowley (Chairman), Camille Robinson-Regis, Eudine Job-Davis, Edward Hart, Ganga Singh and Dr. Roodal Moonilal.

After five meetings, the Committee put forward six main recommendations with several guidelines including:

(1) Arrangements be made for full debates and the business of both Houses of Parliament to be transmitted live to the public through the electronic media (television and radio);

(2) An edited/packaged version of the proceedings of both Houses should be provided as a supplementary service;

(3) A Standing Committee on Broadcasting be appointed to oversee the establishment of guidelines and other matters relating to the live broadcast of proceedings;

(4) A dedicated channel be set up solely for the purpose of broadcasting parliamentary affairs. In this respect, a collaborative effort between the Parliament and the Government Information Service was required since that Division has the necessary equipment and expertise for broadcasting;

(5) An upgrade of Information Technology systems of the Parliament be undertaken to facilitate live transmission by internet. The Committee agreed that this was an imperative and recommended that this service be made available as soon as possible;

(6) That as happens in other jurisdictions, in the use of parliamentary privilege, provisions be made.

Quite notably, other additional guidelines for Parliamentary broadcasting addressed the use of recordings or film footage, operation of cameras, privilege, the right of reply and sanctions. With the submission of this report on 24th June, 2004 the plans of establishing electronic media dedicated to Parliamentary proceedings and events were well underway.

On 18th August, 2006 the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago televised its first live feed of a sitting of the House via its own television Channel available to cable subscribers in Trinidad. Soon afterwards the television channel was added to the cable lineup in Tobago; and in November 2007, the Parliament began broadcasting its proceedings via radio on the frequency 105.5 FM. The establishment of the Parliament Channel has given more transparency to the proceedings and work of our Parliament, and the persons entrusted with our democracy. We’ve broadcast
programmes about Parliaments across the region and the world, as well as all aspects of democracy and the work of the Parliament in general. The Parliament Channel is supported by its social media presence which has flourished over the years and provides citizens with round the clock access to content across various platforms including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Additionally, the Parliament also has two YouTube channels, ParlView and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago which hosts our productions. On Parlview, members of the public can view live Sittings of the House of Representatives, the Senate, Joint Select Committee meetings and parliamentary conferences.

Since its first broadcast, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago can certainly boast of several highlights and proud moments. The Parliament Channel is still the only broadcast station owned by a Parliament in the region, becoming a full member of the Caribbean Broadcasting Union in 2015 and has twice won the Caribbean Broadcasting Award for Best Television Documentary with “West Indies at War” and “The Vote at 70”, as well as the award for Responsible Coverage of Children’s Issues for “I Count”. The Parliament Channel also won the inaugural Award for Local Content by the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. Another historical milestone in the Parliament Channel’s journey was in January 2020 when it returned to its traditional home in the heart of the capital Port of Spain with the move of The Office of the Parliament from Tower D at the International Waterfront Centre back to the newly refurbished Red House. And on 30th June, 2021 the proceedings of the House of Representatives were shown on the Parliament’s television channel; however, viewers were able to see both Sittings simultaneously live via the Parliament’s YouTube Channel Parlview.

We thank the public, our stakeholders and service providers for partnering with us over the last 15 years in our role of redefining democracy at the Parliament Channel.

For further information, please contact our Corporate Communications Officers, Atiba Wiltshire at awiltshire@ttparliament.org or Melissa Griffith-Belgrave at mgriffith@ttparliament.org.

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