



Response to Trinidad Guardian story

The Trinidad Guardian printed a story on page A8 of their edition of Saturday 12th October titled "Kamla to file no-confidence motion against Speaker". I wrote to the Guardian Editor on Saturday 12th October at 2:09pm to clarify the incident which occurred in the Parliament Chamber on Friday 11th October, however I did not receive a response. I wrote again on Wednesday 16th October at 9:00am and there was still no acknowledgement. My letter was not printed in any of this week's editions, including Saturday 19th October, so I take this opportunity to clarify the incident.

Saturday 12th October, 2019

Dear Editor,

I am writing to respond to the captioned story "Kamla to file no-confidence motion against Speaker" with a byline by Shaliza Hassanali published on page A8 of the Guardian of Saturday October 12, 2019.

In particular, Ms. Hassanali writes in paragraphs 3, 4 and 5, "Persad-Bissessar complained about being treated unfairly when she was asked by a police officer and a member of Parliament's Communication Department to speak to the media outside the Chamber. This got Persad-Bissessar upset because only moments before reporters had interviewed Leader of Government Business Camille Robinson-Regis in the Chamber. The media was advised not to conduct interviews inside the Chamber by Parliament staff."

It is a well-established protocol at the Parliament's Tower D location that all media interviews with Members of Parliament should be conducted in the Sir Ellis Clarke Hallway adjacent to the Chamber. This is not Ms. Hassanali's first time reporting from the Chamber so she is well aware of that. In addition, members of the media were reminded a few weeks ago in the whatsapp chat established with the Parliament's Communications Department that no interviews are to be conducted in the Chamber. The guidelines for reporting from the Parliament Chamber have repeatedly been shared with media personnel as well as with the Media Association.

Following the Finance Minister's presentation of the budget on Monday October 7th, I personally spoke with members of the media in the Media Gallery reminding them that all interviews were to be conducted in the lobby of the Chamber entrance on that day in particular, where the norm is that a backdrop, podium and microphone had been set up by the Parliament's Communications Department to facilitate media interviews with key persons.

With regard to Friday's incident, two senior newspaper journalists, including one of Ms. Hassanali's Guardian colleagues, called out to Mrs. Robinson-Regis from the media gallery for an interview during the lunch break while the electronic media had already set up their equipment in the Sir Ellis Clarke Hallway in order to interview the Leader of the Opposition. When the Parliament's Communications Officers realized what had occurred, they immediately indicated to the two journalists and Mrs. Robinson-Regis that all interviews were to be done in the Hallway and the interview ended. A Parliament police officer was also asked to intervene at that point. During this time, Ms. Hassanali took the opportunity to try to interview the Opposition Leader and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre while they were still in the Chamber and making their way to the Sir Ellis Clarke Hallway. Again, the Parliament's Communications Officers intervened and reiterated to Ms. Hassanali and the two Members that no interviews were to be conducted in the Chamber. At this point the Opposition Leader and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre raised their objections to not being allowed to be interviewed in the Chamber while Mrs. Robinson-Regis was. After further explanation by the Communications Officers, the Members eventually went to the Sir Ellis Clarke Hallway where interviews were conducted with all media.

I find it passing strange that Ms. Hassanali did not mention in her story that she was personally reminded by the Parliament's Communications Officers prior to the start of the sitting that all interviews were to be done in the Sir Ellis Clarke Hallway.

I hope this serves to clear up any misconception of bias on the part of the Parliament's Communications Officers and Police Officers, as we strive to uphold the tenets of impartiality in the execution of our duties in the Parliament, and I also hope this letter will be given equal prominence to the original story.

Best,
Colleen Holder
Director, Corporate Communications and Productions
Office of the Parliament