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ACM Statement On The Impending Closure Of The BBC Caribbean Service

January 25, 2011 - The Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM) is saddened by the announcement by the British Broadcasting Corporation that its popular Caribbean Service is to be closed.

The ACM wishes to pay tribute to the West Indian men and women and their British counterparts who strove for more than 40 years, and more recently, in more than 15 years of unbroken service to present a balanced, comprehensive and intelligent picture of life in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Service has also been an invaluable source of insightful analyses and commentaries on the effect of world economics and politics on the region.

While the BBC has created several incarnations of the BBC Caribbean Service going back to the Second World War, the ACM honours the contribution of the late Hugh Crosskill, who as editor of the modern Caribbean Service shaped the unit into a significant source of regional radio news. We pay special tribute to the fine work of his long-standing successor, Debbie Ransome, a veteran journalist who increased the Caribbean Service's output and made it an essential part of radio listening diets across the region.

The Caribbean Service's journalists and producers deserve the highest commendation. They also deserve the unequivocal assurance that their names - household names for thousands of Caribbean people - will not be lost to regional broadcasting. The ACM believes that this is an opportunity for bold, collective action by Caribbean media owners and managers to ensure that the careers of men and women who contributed significantly to regional information and understanding can continue.

It is in this regard that the ACM calls on the Caribbean Media Corporation and the Caribbean Broadcasting Union, whose mandates and functions mirror that of the Caribbean Service, to move immediately to create a viable alternative. The CMC, especially, which has inherited the Caribbean News Agency (CANA), a trusted and independent organisation that gave so many of the BBC Caribbean staff their start, must now seize the opportunity to ensure that the region does not skip a beat in making the transition from a London-based Caribbean news organisation to a Caribbean-based news agency.

While the ACM applauds the sterling work of its colleagues in London, it has long believed that only a truly Caribbean institution that is to the region what the BBC has been to the world can be a vital part of the communications mix in a Caribbean single economy and a Caribbean single marketplace of ideas.

The Caribbean needs a distinctive service of high quality news and information that is collected, distilled and explained by some of its veteran journalists, not a hodge-podge of duplicated copy from national media houses.

Let it not be said that in a moment of adversity, the Caribbean media failed to shed considerations of parochialism and profit to create a trustworthy source of Caribbean news and information.

It would be a sad commentary on the fruit of regional independence and integration and the greatest possible disservice to the people of this region if the Caribbean broadcast media, who do possess the resources, lack the will to do what the moment demands of them.