

**CIVIL SOCIETY REVIEW OF CODE OF POLITICAL CONDUCT**  
**Held at the Conference Room, Grenada Red Cross Society**  
**Thursday, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

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The Review Session began at 9.20 a.m. Ms. Sandra Ferguson welcomed participants on behalf of the IAGDO.

**1. Background/Context:**

Ms. Judy Williams of GRENCODA/IAGDO provided the background and context in which the exercise was taking place.

In 1995, the Inter Agency Group of Development Organizations tried to mobilize civil society to ensure that persons who put themselves up for public office were held accountable. There was a perception that persons were not addressing issues. The IAGDO therefore facilitated constituency fora and invited candidates from each constituency to participate. Some politicians did not respond to the invitation.

In 1999, the IAGDO took the process a step further and mobilized a civil society grouping to develop a Code of Conduct to govern the election campaign process.

In 2003, the process was much clearer and more inclusive. Over 25 organizations endorsed the code. Two political parties, including the incumbent, did not sign the code.

At the present time, May 2008, an election is due. If persons holding public office were to be held accountable, civil society must organize itself. Currently, civil society was not doing enough as citizens or organizations.

**2. Agenda:**

The following agenda was proposed for the morning's exercise:

- (i) review of the 2003 Code of Conduct in order to develop a code to govern the campaign process for the due election

- (ii) develop a programme of public awareness re the Code - too many people do not substantively discuss the issues facing the country
- (iii) set the priority issues which public must expect politicians/candidates to address on the campaign platform

### 3. Concerns/Queries:

- Persons enquired about enforcement of the Code - was it backed by any sanctions.

Ms. Williams advised that there was no legislation or constitutional provisions for a Code of Political Conduct. However she noted that the Code of Political Conduct makes provisions for a Watch Dog Committee to monitor its implementation.

- George Grant advised that a poll conducted by his website, grenadabroadcast.com, indicated that the public were of the view that the Code should be backed up by consequences.
- There were queries about the Watch Dog Committee - did it/would it have any teeth?

Ms. Williams reminded persons that the document is/would be a document of civil society. It would be up to all organizations participating in the review/development exercise to decide what the content of the document should be.

- It was noted that without consequences the code would not be effective. However, it was through public education that the electorate would be sensitized and aware in order to impose sanctions. This underscored the critical importance of public education around the Code.

It was noted that the focus of the Code should be on :

- How to reach political parties?
- How to build political awareness so that politicians buy into the code.

#### 4. Review of 2003 Code of Political Conduct:

The following recommendations and comments were noted to guide the work of the Drafting Committee in the development of the 2008 Code:

- Ref. Pg 2 - The *1<sup>st</sup> Whereas* of the preamble should make reference to **Chapter 1, para. 1 the Constitution** which addresses **fundamental rights and freedoms**, particularly that dealing with freedom of assembly and association.
- Listing of Civil Society Organizations to be revised to reflect the names of organizations which participate in the current exercise.
- Ref. page 3, **Goal** - insert **demonstrates**; amend to read ".....upholds the rule of law, **demonstrates** respect for all citizens....."

Goal should also make reference to the constitution re:

- (i) upholding the rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens
- (ii) upholding the human and civic rights of all
- Ref. pg. 3, **Objectives** - should make provisions for:
  - (i) sanctions
  - (ii) evaluation at the end of the campaign - how did parties and candidates do re adherence to the Code
  - (iii) public education
  - (iv) monitoring the conduct of elections - to precede evaluation. It was agreed that the details as regards monitoring would be captured by the *Watch Dog Committee*

The Code should be the "yard stick" by which civil society and the general public would be able to measure the focus on issues and the conduct of the campaign.

- Ref. pg 3, **Declaration** - the declaration will be the content/basis for public education. This is what the public will be asked to take responsibility for monitoring.

Replace "peaceful" with "political"; to read ".....and other forms of political activities in connection with ....."

- Ref. pg 3-4, **Declaration, Agree to:**

3.1 - to be more deliberate and specific - use the term "socio-economic development" to ensure that issues of the environment are adequately addressed.

3.2 - as is presently, is reference to "and in public office" too broad?

Consensus was that the Code should be as specific as possible to general elections and the campaign. Recommend that "and in public office" be deleted and "in the aftermath of elections" added

It was noted that Civil Society also has to ensure that the *Integrity in Public Life* legislation is properly put in place. It would address post-election conduct of those holding public office.

Amended to read, "*maintain the highest moral principles and ethics with regards to the campaign and elections and in the aftermath of elections...*"

3.3 - should it be amended to refer specifically to the election campaign?

Add a 3.5 - "*uphold the spirit and letter of the law and constitution relating to the holding of public activities and the election campaign*"

Recommended that Watch Dog Committee be asked to deal with issues of noise pollution.

- Ref. pg.4/5, **Declaration , Agree to refrain from:**

It was noted that the ruling party had an unfair advantage, using state resources for political campaign. It was suggested that there should be a cut-off point after which the ruling party should not use ministry ads and state resources to

facilitate its political campaign. The use of GIS to promote political candidates was noted.

Was there a Public Service Code which addressed this matter?

There was a blurring between party and government - **public education require to assist public to differentiate between party and government.**

Since the use of state resources applicable only to the party in office, this should be captured in a SEPARATE heading:

"..refrain from the use and abuse of state resources to campaign "

- Ref. pg. 6 , **Declaration, Agree to Ensure that:**

There was debate as to whether talk shows should be specifically named in the Code. It was noted that specifically targeting talk shows would contravene the constitutional right of "freedom of expression".

It was felt that where talk shows were aligned to any specific political party, it would be captured as "political activities" under the code.

Managers of media stations should also be encouraged to allocate prime time to all parties - a task of the Implementation Committee for the Code.

- Ref. pg. 6 Political Parties and Independent Candidates Also Agree:

6 (i) "to maintain and respect.....and election campaigning" should be relocated to Section 3., Agree to

- Ref. pg. 5 **Watch Dog Committee**

There was debate as to whether the committee should be an implementation committee or a watch dog committee. It was

felt that the term "watch dog" had more marketing appeal. It was a term that the "man on the street" could relate to. This was important since it was the objective of civil society to have the public monitor and guard the implementation of the Code.

Therefore the functions of the Watch Dog Committee to be broadened. The following functions were recommended:

- (i) public education around the Code and issues that civil society wanted politicians to address on the platform
- (ii) monitoring the election campaign activities and conduct of candidates
- (iii) networking with bodies the OAS which is also involved in monitoring elections in Grenada and networking with regional and international bodies which place governance as an important objective
- (iv) active engagement with different networks which can bring moral suasion to bear
- (v) meeting with political parties, as part of local networking to advocate for adherence to the Code of Political Conduct
- (vi) Report to the broader body of civil society

The following queries were raised with respect to Watch Dog Committee:

- (i) Should the Watch Dog Committee have a role on election day?
- (ii) Does it/will it have the credentials required for monitoring the process on election day?

It was noted that every citizen has a responsibility to observe and make recommendations about what is going wrong and needs to be corrected prior to elections, during elections and after elections.

The role that civil society can and should be play during elections is to be further discussed.

## **5. Next Steps:**

1. A Drafting Committee will put together the draft Code based on the recommendations of the review of the 2003 Code. The Drafting Committee is as follows:

- Grenada Bar Association (to be named)
- Elaine McQueen, GNOW/IAGDO, convenor
- Victoria Hughes
- Art Foster
- Christopher DeRiggs

A meeting of the Drafting Committee was proposed for Thursday, May 15<sup>th</sup>. This will be confirmed by Elaine McQueen.

2. A meeting of organizations and individuals which took part in the review process will be convened on Friday, May 22<sup>nd</sup> to review the draft document with a view to finalization. The code will also be circulated to organizations which did not attend the initial review process.

3. The meeting will also look at the composition of the Watch Dog Committee and plans for the signing and implementation of the Code.

**Adjournment:** 11.30 a.m.

**Next meeting of civil society organizations:** Friday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>. (Venue will be the Grenada Red Cross. This will be confirmed.)

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**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

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