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CHAUBEY: Today is May 12, 2009. My name is Varanya Chaubey, and I am sitting with
              Remington Eastman, who is project manager of the Media Monitoring Unit at
              GECOM (Guyana Elections Commission) in Guyana. Thank you, Mr. Eastman,
              for participating in this interview.

EASTMAN: *Well, thank you, Ms. Chaubey, and thank you for having me.*

CHAUBEY: We'd like to begin by asking a little bit about your personal background, so would
              you describe the position that you hold now and how you came to it?

EASTMAN: *OK, just to reintroduce myself, my name is Remington Eastman, and presently
              I'm the project head for the Media Monitoring Unit of the Guyana Elections
              Commission. Just a brief insight into my background, which is not very
              spectacular: I hold a diploma in public communication from the University of
              Guyana, and I also hold a degree in mass communication from University of
              Guyana.*

              *I started work with the Media Monitoring Unit in 2006 at the level of supervisor,
              and I was appointed manager in 2007 after the incumbent manager departed—
              which would be Mr. Jainarine—after he departed to do his postgraduate in
              communication in England.*

CHAUBEY: I'd like to now ask you—to go back to the issue of setting up the 2006 Media
              Monitoring Unit, would you describe your role during that time?

EASTMAN: *I was not integrally involved in the setting up of the unit. I was one of the
              fortunate ones who was interviewed and employed in the unit at the level of
              supervisor. But reflecting back on that time, the person who I think was the most
              important person in setting up of the unit in 2006 was Mr. Tim Neale. He came to
              Guyana in 2006 as the consultant to the Media Monitoring Unit, and he played a
              very critical and important role in the formation of the unit, most importantly in the
              methodology that the unit started to use then and is still using now.*

CHAUBEY: Now what was Mr. Neale's affiliation?

EASTMAN: *Mr. Neale came to Guyana as the consultant but his portfolio—he worked with
              the British Broadcasting Corporation for something like 30 years, training radio
              announcers. He has a wealth of experience in media in general because he has
              worked in Africa, he has worked in the Caribbean, he has worked in various parts
              of the world. So he brought with him a lot of experience, a lot of knowledge of
              media and what professional journalism is all about.*

              *So he was able to impart a lot of knowledge to us who were employed to monitor
              the media. He was also able to impart experience to practicing journalists in the
              country.*

CHAUBEY: You mentioned that he among others were important in coming up with the
              methodology that was used. Would you describe that methodology and the
              experiences he brought from his career outside Guyana?

EASTMAN: *OK, the methodology that Mr. Neale introduced—and I wouldn't want to take
              away some of the praise from Jainarine, because he was part of that process*

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also in coming up with the methodology—but, as Jainarine stated earlier in his interview, it is basically a methodology that is based on quantity and quality.

Quantitatively, in terms of the broadcast media, we timed them in terms of minutes, how many minutes of positive coverage they gave to a political party during the 2006 elections. Qualitatively, we looked at whether any infringement of the media code was manifested by any one of these TV stations or newspapers or radio stations. So basically, the methodology in summary was quantitative and qualitative.

CHAUBEY: Now I'd also like to ask you: in 2007, you mentioned you were appointed manager.

EASTMAN: Yes.

CHAUBEY: What were some of the challenges you faced going into your job?

EASTMAN: I should backtrack somewhat and say that I left after the 2006 elections. It was basically for two reasons. I left the unit because it wasn't certain whether the unit would have continued, because really and truly the life of the unit should have come to an end after the elections. The elections ended in August 2006, and the life of the unit should have come to an end one month after, which would have been in September 2006.

Between September 2006 and, say, January 2007, we were uncertain whether the donor community would have continued funding the unit. As a matter of fact, after the September cutoff date no funding came from the donor community. The unit was kept alive through the Guyana Elections Commission, but again the donors thought that the unit did a very good job in 2006 in ensuring that the elections were peaceful and so on. And they thought in their collective wisdom that the unit should continue. But there was that period of uncertainty between 2006 and 2007 when we didn't know exactly where we stood. So they say in the first line, life is self-preservation, so I opted for another job offer that came my way.

I worked for a while with the US Center for Disease Control; I worked in community mobilization and public relations. After the incumbent head got a scholarship to do his master's in England, I was invited by the head of GECOM, Dr. [Steve] Surujbally, to come back and head the unit, and that is how I returned.

When I returned, some of the challenges that I faced were logistical, in the sense that we weren't getting the resources that we required to really keep us functioning the way we were supposed to function. Secondly—the other challenge that I had was really asserting the presence of the Media Monitoring Unit within the media environment of the country.

CHAUBEY: And how did you go about doing that?

EASTMAN: OK, let me take it one thing at a time. In terms of resources, normally whenever donors are going to disburse money to whatever project it is, you have to come up with a project proposal that is attractive. You have to come up with your objectives. You have to come up with what you intend to achieve, and once it's

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attractive, once it makes sense, the donor community is always willing to chip in and aid in the process. So it was really sitting down and coming up with a plan of keeping the unit alive, in the sense of coming up with outputs, coming up with goals, coming up with objectives that were in sync with the thinking of the donor community at the same time.

What we came up with, they found it attractive. It was sellable. We were given the resources that we needed, not just in terms of keeping the unit alive and kicking and going, but in terms of transforming the operations of the unit, because during the 2006 elections the unit was using analog technology to get its work done. We all know that analog technology right now is obsolete, so there has been a transformation from analog technology to being fully digital.

That was one challenge. The other challenge was getting the media to know that the Media Monitoring Unit has not been dissolved, the Media Monitoring Unit is still in place. Because at the end of the elections the media went back to its same old habits. The same old habits in the sense that there were a lot of instances in both the print and the broadcast media of inaccuracies, of unsubstantiated allegations, of inflammatory rhetoric, of the peddling of racial remarks and so on.

So even though the media was brought under some sort of self-regulation during the elections time, with the perception that the Media Monitoring Unit was no longer around, the media went back to its old habits. So the challenge for the unit—not so much for me; I don't want to take the praise right for the unit because you work here as a team—the challenge for the unit was to get the media to come back in line. That I think was a major challenge then and still is a major challenge now.

The reason it's a challenge is that for you to get the compliance, for you to get the cooperation of the media, there must be something that you can hold them to. The 2006 Media Code of Conduct that was drafted for the election is basically an election document. It basically looked at some of the issues that will come up during an election and made pronouncements on how journalists should go about addressing these issues, how to have equity and fairness and accuracy and so on. But outside of an election this document was kind of limited, so there was nothing to hold them to really. So what the unit did was refer the practicing journalists in the country to what Jainarine referred to in his interview as the best practices associated with journalism.

And we look at documents such as the Media Code of Ethics from the Society of Professional Journalists; we also refer to documents like the Media Code of Ethics used by respected media organizations such as the British Broadcasting Corporation, Associated Press, and so on. We wrote to them and let them know, "Here, this is what you, as a professional journalist, should be abiding by, because this is what obtains globally." Based on that we have been able so far to solicit an acceptable amount of compliance and cooperation from the local media fraternity.

CHAUBEY: Now it appears that during this process, you have had to be in contact with the media houses themselves. What are the challenges of doing that, and how have you gone about convincing people, whether it's on a personal level or through formal discussions?

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EASTMAN: One of the major challenges that I have found so far—. I want to mention that the Media Monitoring Unit is not the only media monitoring unit in the country. There is another media monitoring unit called the Advisory Committee on Broadcasting. This is a legislative body, meaning that it came out through legislation from Parliament. The Media Monitoring Unit, on the other hand, is not a legislative body. It is really like an informal body in the form of a project. Now the Advisory Committee on Broadcasting has more clout than the Media Monitoring Unit, the reason being that the Advisory Committee on Broadcasting can take legal action against media outfits in the country. The Media Monitoring Unit cannot do that.

                The other difference between the Advisory Committee on Broadcasting and the Media Monitoring Unit is that the Advisory Committee on Broadcasting really relates to the broadcast media only; it does not relate to the print media. So in that sense the Advisory Committee on Broadcasting is very limited. They are not only limited in scope, they are also limited in terms of their technical capacity; they are still using analog technology and so on. They are also limited in the sense of credibility because they are seen as a government body, as against the MMU [Media Monitoring Unit], which is not government-affiliated. MMU is funded by international donor support, so in a sense we are not seen as being aligned to like the government or any political party as such.

                Now the challenge is that the Media Monitoring Unit work is based on moral suasion, in that we cannot compel people to follow along on certain parts; we can only advise them. That is one of the major challenges that we have, and we can have discussions with people and so on, but then they can still go back to the same old thing, as often happens. The ACB [Advisory Committee on Broadcasting]—when they advise, their advice is more in terms of—it's not maybe so much advice, but more like a warning that precedes legal action being taken. But, as I said, the ACB is restricted, and a lot of things that we are able to uncover in the media, they are not. That has been one of the major challenges for the MMU, in the sense that we don't have that legal authority, that legislative authority to sanction. The most we can try do is to convince people through our presence, through our credibility, through our integrity.

CHAUBEY: That seems like quite a challenging task.

EASTMAN: It is.

CHAUBEY: Are there some tactics that you think have worked particularly well, and some things that you would perhaps like your counterparts in other countries to know about?

EASTMAN: Well, I wouldn't speak in the present; I would go back to 2006 election. I think the most effective tool in getting compliance from the media, as you put it, is to name and shame. That is the most effective tool in getting compliance from the media, because even now that we are outside of an election period, whenever we come across transgressions in the media and we write to them and give them the evidence of the transgression that they would have committed, we always get that query from them that they hope that the other media outlets don't know about this. So based on my experience working with the unit, I think legislation is the most effective tool, but outside of legislation the most effective tool is to name and shame.

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CHAUBEY: Now you mentioned that the ACB can actually take legal action. Would you be able to provide some examples off the top of your head of cases where they have done so?

EASTMAN: *Yes, they did so very recently, but it wouldn't be a case of the ACB actually themselves taking legal action against these media outlets in the broadcast media. It's a process whereby they advise the prime minister—in this case now, it's the president, who has authority over the broadcast […], because one of his positions is minister of communications—so that's why they are called the Advisory Committee on Broadcasting. They advise the president, and then he in turn institutes legal action. Coming to some examples, there was an example of Channel 6, which was closed down for four months because of infringement of the broadcast license. There was also the instance of Channel 9 being taken to court…what else? Basically, those were the two examples that stand out.*

CHAUBEY: Now you mentioned that this name and shame tactic is particularly effective when you have moral suasion in order to get compliance. Is there also the case that as you work in this position you build up relationships with people in media houses, and then you're able to use that to some degree to persuade media personalities?

EASTMAN: *Definitely, definitely from writing these media organizations over and over, eventually we get to meet each other on a one-on-one basis, and they get to understand what it is that we're trying to do here at the Media Monitoring Unit, and that is to raise professional standards of journalism in the country. We have gotten the support of many of them, but many of them are still recalcitrant, still reservist, but it's a work in progress.*

CHAUBEY: Now what are the reasons that those who are reluctant to come on board provide for why they choose not to comply?

EASTMAN: *I guess it all hinges on the fact that they know that we can only try to influence them to go along a different path. There's no way that we can compel them; I guess that would be the main reason why some people have not fully come on board as of yet. We might see an infringement committed by a particular media outlet, we may write them, but then again, you see it happen again probably a couple months down the line, and then we remind them that, "Look, we have pointed this out to you before," but that is the case sometimes. But in most instances I must say that we have the cooperation of most of the media in the country.*

CHAUBEY: Now I'd like to get a sense for the sorts of meetings that you have with people at the media houses. What is the level of leadership with which you liaise?

EASTMAN: *If you could rephrase that question—when you say the level of leadership, the people that I interact with, or…?*

CHAUBEY: Yes the people that you interact with.

EASTMAN: *I mostly interact with editors of programs. If a program, let's say, on TV doesn't have an editor, then I interact directly with the program host.*

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CHAUBEY: And how often do you find yourself meeting them? Is there a formal mechanism for meeting?

EASTMAN: *No there's no formal mechanism: either they request a meeting with me, or I request a meeting with them. There is no structured approach that says that we have meetings every month or every quarter. No, it just happens on an ad hoc basis, on a need-to-interact basis.*

CHAUBEY: I'd like to move now to the question of technology. You mentioned that this Media Monitoring Unit has moved from analog technology to digital. What were the sorts of cost consideration associated with that? How did you make that move in the most cost-effective way?

EASTMAN: *Moving from analog to digital technology entails significant cost. But the good thing about it is that it's a one-time investment for years to come. It entails significant cost; I would not be able to give you the figure off the top of my head in terms of US dollars, but in terms of Guyana dollars it was something in like ten million, which was approximately $50,000 to $60,000 US to make that transition.*

CHAUBEY: And what was the technology that you brought on, the digital technology?

EASTMAN: *The digital technology, as the term implies is computerized technology in the sense that we have moved away from using VCRs and televisions to capture everything, to do all our work on the computer itself, meaning that we are using computers to capture TV programs.*

CHAUBEY: And where did the idea for this technology come from?

EASTMAN: *This idea actually came from a British consultant that we have working here at the Guyana Elections Commission, by the name of Gavin Campbell. And if I may add, this computerized system that we are using now has been used as a model in Malawi. A matter of fact it's now being used as a model in Malawi, because the same guy that I referred to earlier, Mr. Tim Neale, recently set up a media monitoring unit in Malawi, and I was in a position to furnish him with all the technical details in terms of the equipment and everything that he would have needed to start the unit on the same basis that we have it here.*

CHAUBEY: Now if you hadn't chosen this computerized route, what were the other options that you were considering at the time in order to move to digital technology?

EASTMAN: *There was no other option, really. I just put the idea to Campbell and asked him to come up with something, because we needed to move away from this analog technology. It was becoming very problematic in terms of storage, among other things. We have limited space. And he just came up with that based on his—well, he's very knowledgeable in terms of computer technology and so on. So it was no big thing for him really.*

CHAUBEY: I'd like to ask a little bit about your activities since the 2006 elections, and what you see as the role of the Media Monitoring Unit going into the next set of elections?

EASTMAN: *From the end of the 2006 elections until now, the Media Monitoring Unit has been kept very busy in terms of trying to keep the media in the country behaving*

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in a professional way. I think the importance of the Media Monitoring Unit to the whole fabric of Guyanese society was manifested during—I don't know if you'd be aware that we had something in this country called the Lusignan and Bartica massacres. You may not, but it was all over the global media. We had two massacres in this country, which was—the perception was that it was racially influenced, because it was seen as an attack by Africans against East Indians, in which a lot of people lost their lives, including small children, children just months old. That's why it was referred to as not just the Lusignan or the Bartican but as a massacre, because it was a case where defenseless people were killed while they were sleeping. It's not a case where there was an armed confrontation.

In the aftermath of that, in the midst of it and in the aftermath, we had a sort of behavior coming out from the media, just as in elections time, where you had certain sections of the media—East Indian extremists were given airtime; in newspapers they were given a lot of space, column inches. That was in one section of the media. In another section of the media you had African extremists who were given airtime, and in newspapers were given a lot of column inches, especially in the letters to the editor column. And there was this spewing of racial propaganda and race baiting and so on, and it was exacerbating the tense situation.

At that time, during the massacres at Lusignan and Bartica, this country was almost on the brink of a racial war between the two major camps. And this racial war was being fueled not implicitly but explicitly through the media. And here's where the Media Monitoring Unit really stepped in and really calmed nerves, got media personalities to tone down the rhetoric. This was not just through writing to them; this was a more proactive approach, in that the leadership of the MMU went from TV station to TV station distributing newspapers showing them what the consequences of the media filtering this kind of information can have, by referring to historical precedents like Rwanda, Yugoslavia, and so on.

Here is where the value of the Media Monitoring Unit to this country was proven, because even though we are a kind of quasi body as against the ACB, which is a legal body, the work that we did then in bringing some sort of calm, some sort of acceptable peace among the warring factions is well documented.

CHAUBEY: That seems like it was quite a significant move by the MMU. When you mentioned that the leadership of the MMU took a more proactive role, who was it that was involved?

EASTMAN: *Well Jainarine was in England at that time, so we didn't have a functioning deputy, so it was basically me. But I don't want to take any praise. I had to depend on the work of the monitors; they brought the evidence to me. I was just a manager; I couldn't do everything at the same time. I depended on them as much as they depended on me. So it was a team effort. In terms of interfacing with the, with the media personalities, with the editors, with the talk show hosts and so on, that was basically my job. But in terms of me taking the evidence, it had to come from somewhere, and that's why I said it was a team effort.*

CHAUBEY: I'd also like to ask about the MMU's relationship with GECOM. What are the sorts of issues on which you interact? Is it a formal institutionalized meeting process? How does that relationship function?

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EASTMAN: *OK, the relationship with MMU and GECOM—now when donors gave funding,
             they would give it to an autonomous body if it is in a form of an NGO [non-
             governmental organization]. Outside of that, if they are going to give funding to
             any organization, that organization has to have what is called a formal structure.
             The MMU in order to get funding had to come out of some organization; whether
             it was a media organization, which really doesn't exist in this country, it had to
             come out—basically the MMU was formed to really monitor the media during
             elections. The appropriate organization that the donors saw fit to form the MMU
             was the Guyana Elections Commission. Now the relationship between the MMU
             and the Guyana Elections Commission is more of a formal one, in the sense that
             the head for the MMU is Dr. Surujbally, who is the Chairman of the Guyana
             Elections Commission.*

             *How does the work of the MMU impact on the work of GECOM? GECOM has a
             public relations department. That public relations department depends on us to
             furnish them with certain information, that is, in the media. Whether it's
             somebody protesting against the electoral system, somebody who feels
             disenfranchised, somebody who is making unsubstantiated accusations against
             the organization, which is continuous, which is perennial, the public relations
             department of the Guyana Elections Commission doesn't have the facilities to
             really keep tabs of all of these media organizations—we have that capacity. So
             we have what you call a symbiotic relationship: we depend on the Guyana
             Elections Commission in terms of securing funding and keeping the organization
             going; they depend on us in terms of their public image, getting the evidence to
             rebut, and so on.*

CHAUBEY: Are there certain issues in which GECOM becomes involved in dealing with the
             media houses—either they sort of interface with the media houses, or…?

EASTMAN: *Yes, they do. They interface with the media houses a lot. As a matter of fact, the
             Guyana Elections Commission holds a lot of press conferences. A lot of these
             press conferences would be to bring the media up to speed on the work of the
             commission, especially in this period when there will be local government
             elections sometime before the end of the year. So, yes, they interact, and they
             interface with the media on a continuous basis.*

CHAUBEY: Well, we've covered a lot of topics here, and I'd like to ask you now if there is
             something I haven't brought up that you would like to discuss?

EASTMAN: *Between this interview and the last and the few that you have done, I would
             guess that have covered a lot—more than what you set out to discover. It could
             have been that we missed certain things along the line, depending on what your
             objective was, but I think there are just two things that I would want to touch on
             before we wrap up.*

             *One thing is very important. You've got to understand that Guyana is a third-
             world country, a developing country, and I use the word "developing" very
             carefully, because developing is supposed to be an incremental process: you are
             here today and you are there tomorrow. But this process of development can
             only occur in an environment that is conducive to progress, conducive to
             development. Now politicians, civil society, the major stakeholders in society
             could mouth as much as they want about democratic governance and
             accountability, whatever, whatever. Going to elections and voting for a*

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government is not the end of the process. Now the link between democracy and anarchy, that link—believe it or not—is the media. The media has shown—there are so many studies that have proven it—the media has the ability to either nurture a democracy or derail it.

Worse yet, an unrestricted media, or a media that has no legislative controls, as happens in a country like Guyana—if it's not controlled, if it's not brought under some sort of administrative control, it can be very deleterious to the development of the country.

This was proven in 2001 in this country—and in 2006 it was proven with the setting up of the Media Monitoring Unit—that once you have a conducive media, you will not only have free and fair elections, or elections free from fear, but post elections you can also have a peaceful society that is conducive to the development process. After saying that, it's really making a case not for the MMU, but for the professional media, and this is the work of the Media Monitoring Unit in this country: to nurture and foster a professional cadre of journalists.

CHAUBEY: Well, I would like to thank you very much, Mr. Eastman. You've shared a lot of information with us. Thank you so much.

EASTMAN: *Yes, and let me thank you for being so patient with me.*