



THE COUNCIL FOR RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR

Monitoring and evaluating adherence to the Code

April 10, 2015

MEDIA RELEASE

The Council for Responsible Political Behaviour met on Wednesday April 8, 2015. This being the first meeting following its formal launch, the Council first ratified the *Method for Managing Complaints and Reporting Thereof*, which is appended. With the governance rules in place, the Council deliberated on complaints/issues of possible breaches of the Code. Having been tasked with monitoring and evaluating adherence to the Code of Ethical Political Conduct, the Council will consider all written complaints from the public as well as issues raised by Council members in relation to possible breaches. Deliberations of the Council would be done *in camera* and, where necessary, a statement would be issued, but **only after the deliberation of the Council.**

STATEMENT ON THE COUNCIL'S DELIBERATIONS

Amongst the various complaints/issues raised and deliberated upon, the Council hereby issues the following statement as relates to three specific issues.

1. **Allegation the State-owned media was being used by the United National Congress (UNC) on Monday nights for political broadcasts, contrary to Section 2(13) of the Code.**

The Council observed that on March 13, 2015, during Prime Minister's Question Time in the House of Representatives, the Honourable Prime Minister stated that the UNC's political broadcasts on CNMG were being paid for.

2. **Statements by Honourable Dr Keith Rowley at a People's National Movement (PNM) political meeting at the Brazil High School on March 17, 2015.**

The Council opined that Dr Rowley should be reminded of his party's commitment under Section 1(2) of the Code to: ***"Maintain the highest moral principles and ethical standards with respect to their conduct during the campaign, the elections and the post-election period."***



THE COUNCIL FOR RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR

Monitoring and evaluating adherence to the Code

3. Statements by Honourable Vernella Alleyne-Toppin during her contribution to the debate on the Motion of No Confidence in the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Representatives on March 25, 2015.

The Council observed that sections of the MP's statement *breached* Sections 2(3) and 2(5) of the Code. Section 2(3) of the Code prohibits the making of "*false or defamatory allegations in print or speech in connection with respect of a Party, its Candidates, representatives or members.*" Section 2(5) of the Code prohibits statements which seek to "*assassinate the character of or make defamatory comments about any individual, family, professional group or section of the community.*"

In its deliberations the Council observed that Mrs Alleyne-Toppin's statement was made in the Parliament under the cover of "Parliamentary privilege." The Council wishes to underscore the fact that ethical political conduct is not limited by place, time or space. Parliament cannot be used as a sanctuary to breach the Code. The Council also considered the fact that Mrs Alleyne-Toppin's party, the Tobago Organization of the People (TOP) was not a signatory to the Code. Here the Council adopted the position that it would not be restrained in only evaluating the conduct of signatories, but will evaluate all political actors. Furthermore the Council noted that Mrs Alleyne-Toppin is a Minister of Government. In addition, she serves in a government under a Prime Minister whose party has endorsed the Code of Ethical Political Conduct. The Prime Minister is called upon to ensure that all Members of her Government abide with Section 1(2) of the Code: "*Maintain the highest moral principles and ethical standards with respect to their conduct...*"

The Council takes this opportunity to remind all politically active individuals and Parties of their commitment to abide by the Code which can be viewed on the Council's website: <http://www.politicaethicstt.org> .

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Council,

Dr Bishnu Ragoonath, Chairman



THE COUNCIL FOR RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR

Monitoring and evaluating adherence to the Code

Method for managing complaints and reporting thereof

1. Complaints/Issues for consideration by the Council from the public

The Council will receive complaints from members of the Public by letter or by email. Such correspondence should be addressed to the **Secretary of the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour**, and may be submitted by mail to: **Council Secretariat, c/o Archbishop's House, 27 Maraval Road, Port of Spain**; by email to: info@politicaethicstt.org; or via the website: <http://www.politicaethicstt.org>.

2. Council-initiated review of possible breaches of the Code

The Council would also consider complaints/issues raised by members of the Council where the question of a breach of the Code arises.

3. Limitations

The Code of Ethical Political Conduct is not limited by time or place or space. Effectively, the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour is not restrained from evaluating political conduct outside of election periods or in any locale inclusive of the Parliament or abroad.

The Code applies to all of Trinidad and Tobago and as such the conduct of all political parties/candidates, regardless as to whether or not they signed on to the Code, would be treated as falling under the purview of the Code and the Council.

4. Council Deliberations

The Council will deliberate on complaints received or issues raised by members at meetings of the Council. The Council may meet in special session if members deem it necessary to do so.

5. Confidentiality

All deliberations of the Council as it relates to possible breaches of the Code will be done in camera.

6. Reporting on Complaints/Issues raised

Where the Council, after considering a complaint/issue believes that there has been a breach of the Code, the political party or individual who would have so breached the Code will be so informed, both via their representative on the Council as well as by a formal letter from the Council. Similar notification would also be sent to the complainant as appropriate.

Where necessary the Council may issue a statement indicating its observations.

The Council would also publish periodic reports summarising the number of complaints/issues deliberated upon and the outcome of such deliberations.