

# Making effective media complaints



## KEEPING AN EYE ON THE MEDIA



### WHAT IS OFCOM?

Ofcom is the independent regulator for the communications industry.

However, it is not responsible for complaints about accuracy or impartiality in BBC programmes. These are the responsibility of the BBC Trust, as outlined above in The BBC's Complaints Procedure.

All other TV and radio channels, including ITV, Channel 4 and Sky, are covered by Ofcom.

If you are making a complaint to any of these channels about a programme, it would also be worth sending the complaint to Ofcom, which can examine it from an independent perspective and impose penalties on the broadcaster if it sees fit.

Complaints can be made to Ofcom up to 45 days after transmission.

Contacting Ofcom

T: 020 7981 3040 or 0300 123 3333

Open: Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

E: <http://tiny.cc/6fsey> (fill out the form)

P: Ofcom, Riverside House, 2a Southwark Bridge Road, London, SE1 9HA

## **- How you can monitor and respond to unbalanced coverage of the Occupation**

The cause of justice for Palestine is growing rapidly in the UK, and it is vital that programme makers, not just politicians, realise that they will be held to account if they do not portray the situation fairly and accurately.

If you see a programme, or hear a radio broadcast, that you feel is unbalanced or biased in its portrayal of the Palestinian issue, either proactively or through its omission of key facts or context, please consider contacting the programme makers to make a complaint.

Blatant inaccuracy is also a problem. For example, Jerusalem is often referred to as the capital of Israel by journalists, and this should always be picked up on and corrected. Emails/phone calls should emphasise that Jerusalem is split in two by the Green Line and East Jerusalem is Palestinian land that has been illegally occupied by Israel since 1967. Journalists should be reminded that Jerusalem is not recognised as Israel's capital by the international community.

### **What you can do**

Below are contact details of some of the main television and radio channels in the UK. Complaints should be made as soon as possible after the programme is aired, stating clearly the reasons for dissatisfaction, and asking for a response.

And remember - if you feel a programme was particularly good, let the programme makers know. They may be encouraged to make more of the same, while keeping a closer eye on bias.

Keep us informed - please email copies of your complaint and the response you receive to [fairnews@palestinecampaign.org](mailto:fairnews@palestinecampaign.org)

This will help us to monitor how the media responds to complaints and whether any improvements are being made.

### **TV AND RADIO CONTACT DETAIL**

#### **BBC Television**

T: 03700 100 222

E: [www.bbc.co.uk/complaints](http://www.bbc.co.uk/complaints) (fill out the form)

P: BBC Complaints, PO Box 1922, Darlington DL3 0UT

If you want to write directly to the editor of a programme, the email address is [name.surname@bbc.co.uk](mailto:name.surname@bbc.co.uk)

[Click here for full details of how to complain to the BBC](#)

## **BBC Radio 4**

T: 03700 100 222

E: For most programmes, there will be a 'Contact Us' link on the programme's web pages

If you want to write directly to the editor of a programme, the email address is [name.surname@bbc.co.uk](mailto:name.surname@bbc.co.uk)

*Today*: Ceri Thomas (Editor)

*World at One*: James Angus (Editor)/ Adam Bowen (researcher)

*Six O'Clock News*: Tim Bailey (Editor)

*PM*: Joanna Carr (Editor)/ Adam Bowen (researcher)

*The World Tonight*: Alistair Burnett (Editor)

## **ITV**

T: 0844 88 14150 (Calls cost 5p a minute from a BT landline)

Open: Monday to Friday 8am-7pm; Saturday 10am-7pm

Main desk: 020 7156 6000

Monday to Friday 9.30am-6pm

E: [viewerservices@itv.com](mailto:viewerservices@itv.com)

P: Viewer Services, ITV Plc, Gas Street, Birmingham B1 2JT

## **Channel 4**

T: 0845 076 0191 (lo-call number)

Open: Monday to Friday 9am-9pm; Saturday & Sunday 10am-6pm

E: <http://tinyurl.com/2qu57a> (fill out the form)

P: Channel 4 Enquiries, PO Box 1058, Belfast BT1 9DU

## **Sky News**

E: [news@sky.com](mailto:news@sky.com)

Address comments to Paul Bromley, Viewers' Editor

P: Sky News, BSkyB, Grant Way, Isleworth, Middlesex, TW7 5QD

*PSC, Middle East Monitor and the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding are backing 'Fair News', a project to monitor media coverage of Palestine and Israel*

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# **How to Make a Complaint to the BBC**

## **THE BBC'S COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

Below is a summary of how to complain about a BBC radio or television programme or published article.

You can read about the procedure in full here: <http://tiny.cc/bmidj>

There are three stages to the process

1. **The initial complaint.** This must be made within 30 working days from the transmission or publication. It is made to the BBC Executive

You can:

Make a complaint via the complaints website at [www.bbc.co.uk/complaints](http://www.bbc.co.uk/complaints)

Call the BBC on 03700 100 222

Write to: BBC Complaints, PO Box 1922, Glasgow G2 3WT

Make clear which programme you are complaining about and when it was transmitted.

Your complaint will be logged on the BBC's complaints database and will be given a unique reference number. This will allow the BBC to track the complaint through the process. You will be informed of the unique reference number.

The BBC will conduct its own research into your complaint and aim to reply to you within ten working days. If you're unhappy with the BBC's response, you can try to resolve your complaint with a further exchange of correspondence.

If the complaint has not been resolved within two exchanges of information, you can proceed to Stage 2.

2. **Stage 2.** At this stage, you will escalate your complaint to the Editorial Complaints Unit (ECU). This must be done within 20 working days of the date of your final 'initial complaint' response.

How to proceed:

\* Write to: The Editorial Complaints Unit, Room 5168, BBC White City, 201 White Lane, London W12 7TS

\*Your letter should be clear and concise

\* It should not exceed 1,000 words (in exceptional circumstances, longer complaints will be entertained)

\* It should include the reference number, date and details of your final correspondence with the BBC Executive

This written complaint is particularly important, as it will be the main basis for deciding whether an appeal is taken by the ECU.

The ECU will aim to reply within ten working days, setting out the editorial guidelines against which the complaint will be considered. You may also receive a summary of your complaint, which you can comment on within ten working days.

The ECU will then investigate your complaint. You will be informed of its decision within 20 working days of the summary of your complaint being sent to you (a target of 35 working days applies to particularly complex cases).

If you are not satisfied with the ECU's response, you can proceed to the Appeal Stage.

3. **Appeal Stage.** You can now request an appeal to the BBC Trust. This will be looked at by the Trust's Editorial Standards Committee (ESC). This must be done within 20 working days of the date of the final Stage 2 response (exceptions may be made).

How to proceed:

- \*Write to: The Editorial Standards Committee, 180 Great Portland Street, London W1W 5QZ or email [trust.editorial@bbc.co.uk](mailto:trust.editorial@bbc.co.uk)
- \*Your letter should be clear and concise
- \*It should not exceed 1,000 words (exceptional circumstances apply)
- \*It should include the reference number, date and details of your final correspondence to and from the BBC Executive

The ESC will consider your appeal along with the BBC's response and decide whether you have a justified complaint. It aims to answer your appeal within 80 working days.

If the ESC upholds your appeal, it expects the BBC Executive to take account of its findings.

### ***Additional Links***

*A full account of the BBC Trust's role and responsibilities can be found here: [www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust)*

*The BBC publishes the complaints it receives, and its response, at [www.bbc.co.uk/complaints](http://www.bbc.co.uk/complaints)*

*The BBC's editorial guidelines, which set out the standards expected of BBC content, can be found here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/>*

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# **The Thomas Report - an independent assessment of BBC coverage of Palestine/Israel**

## **THE THOMAS REPORT**

In 2006, an independent panel, chaired by Quentin Thomas, produced a report assessing the impartiality of BBC coverage of the Palestine/Israel situation.

The panel had been commissioned by BBC governors. Its task was to assess the impartiality of the BBC's news and current affairs coverage of the situation 'with particular regard to accuracy, fairness, context, balance and bias, actual or perceived' and to examine whether the BBC's coverage gave 'a full and fair account of the conflict'.

While being generally supportive of the BBC's coverage, the subsequent Thomas Report found 'identifiable shortcomings, particularly in respect of gaps in coverage, analysis, context and perspective and in the consistent maintenance of the BBC's own editorial standards'.

It adds: 'In short, we found that BBC output does not consistently give a full and fair account of the conflict. In some ways the picture is incomplete and, in that sense, misleading'.

The Thomas Report can be viewed in full here:

<http://tinyurl.com/343le6c>

### **Making use of the Thomas Report**

Although the report was published five years ago, the recommendations it makes for improving BBC coverage are still valid and relevant. The report can be used as a reference point when making a complaint to the BBC if you feel a particular programme or news item has failed to incorporate one or more of its recommendations. If you feel that any of the key points made in the report, eg more talk time being given to Israeli spokespeople than to Palestinians, have not been remedied, ask the BBC why.

Main recommendations:

- \*The BBC 'should provide more consistently a full and fair account' allowing viewers or listeners to 'come to an informed and independent judgement of the issues'.
- \*It should do this by providing:
  - a) 'more comprehensive coverage which remedies omissions of significant events and topics
  - b) more historical and other background and context
  - c) a fuller account of situations and issues'
- The BBC 'should make purposive, and not merely reactive, efforts to explain the complexities of the conflict in the round, including the marked disparity between the positions of the two sides'.

Impartiality in the Thomas Report:

- \*The report notes that, given the need for 'as full and fair account of matters as possible...the opposite of impartiality is partial coverage, that is, coverage which fails to mention relevant events or issues'.
- \*An assessment of impartiality needs to take into account the quality of the programmes - 'the extent to which they were comprehensive, penetrating and illuminating'.
- \*Therefore, 'it follows that accuracy, clarity and precision of the language used is crucial: both in avoiding bias, but also in providing comprehension'.

- \*The report makes several mentions of the 'asymmetry of power between the two sides' and notes that, given this asymmetry, 'the BBC's concern with balance [as part of the impartiality doctrine] gave an impression of equality between the two sides which was fundamentally, if unintentionally, misleading'.
- \*The report adds: "While fairness and impartiality are legal requirements, balance is a concept adopted by the BBC in seeking to give effect to them. These objectives, especially balance, work most naturally where the parties to a dispute are on an equal footing. Indeed, without care, a formulaic application of these doctrines, and in particular that of balance, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could produce coverage which misleads from the outset'.

#### Findings:

- \*The BBC gave more talk time to Israeli spokespeople than to Palestinians.
- \*Some important themes were 'relatively overlooked' in the coverage of the situation, including (in 2006) the annexation of land in around East Jerusalem.
- \*BBC broadcast news reported Israeli and Palestinian fatalities differently 'in that Israeli fatalities generally receive greater coverage than Palestinian fatalities'.
- \*Using data provided by the Israeli government and human rights group, B'Tselem, the report found that 'the death of an Israeli killed by the Palestinian side was more likely to be reported by the BBC than the death of a Palestinian killed by the Israeli side'.

#### Final points:

- \*The report justifies what it calls its 'demanding approach' by saying 'it is what the public deserves given the BBC's ambitions to be a premier broadcaster, the public service requirements imposed on it and the public resources it commands'.
- \*Describing 'much of the BBC's coverage' as good, the report adds: 'It is just that some of the deficiencies are serious and that it could be a great deal better: more distinctive, challenging and informative. The risk is that, without firm editorial grip, the BBC will produce, on a massive scale, and through its many outlets, flat coverage following the agenda set by conventional wisdom'.
- \*The BBC, says the report, 'must continue to take the complaints it receives seriously and to handle them with care and sensitivity. It is clearly not enough to say that, as there are complaints from both sides, the BBC is presumably getting its coverage about right. This kind of complacency would not be acceptable and the Panel has not found it among BBC journalists or management. However, complaints do sometimes seem to be treated as a necessary nuisance and dealt with defensively'.