

Editorial Complaints Unit,
BBC,
Media Centre,
Media Village,
201 Wood Lane,
London
W12 7TQ

Wednesday 22nd February 2006

**Re: BBC1 Panorama: 'A Question of Leadership' broadcast on Sunday 21st
August 2005.**

Dear Sirs,

We are writing to you following our complaint to Mike Robinson (Editor, Panorama) about the above-mentioned edition of Panorama and his subsequent response to the Muslim Council of Britain dated 30th September 2005. We apologise for the delay in writing to you as we have been very busy with other matters.

Naturally, we are very disappointed with Mr Robinson's response and his failure to accept that his reporter, John Ware, made a grossly unfair documentary about the Muslim Council of Britain and its response to extremism and the terrorist threat facing the United Kingdom.

So, now we ask you to look into our major objections listed in the attached pages and investigate our concerns.

Yours faithfully,

Mr Inayat Bunglawala,
Secretary,
Media Committee,
The Muslim Council of Britain

[Summary of the MCB's Major Objections to 21.8.05 edition of Panorama]

a) The programme tried to portray the MCB as being 'in denial' about extremism. At the outset of the programme, the reporter, John Ware drew attention to the London bombings and stated:

'[Sir Iqbal Sacranie is] the Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain. After the British bombing of the bar in Tel Aviv, Sir Iqbal said it hadn't marked a growth in Islamist extremism here. Now he does admit there is a problem.'

There can be no doubt, upon reading the above words that Mr Ware equates acts of terrorism committed by Muslims with 'Islamist extremism'. We believe that Mr Ware's implication that Sir Iqbal Sacranie and the MCB were slow to recognise the terror/extremist threat is demonstrably untrue.

The Panorama team made no mention whatsoever during their entire programme to inform their viewers of the MCB's efforts to help promote the common good and avert a terrorist attack in the UK by issuing an emergency appeal – immediately following the Madrid bombings in March 2004 - to every Islamic organisation and mosque in the country urging vigilance against the terror threat and cooperation with the police. In addition, in September 2004, the MCB printed 500,000 copies of a Pocket Guide on Rights and Responsibilities. This contained a section on 'Vigilance and the Terror Threat' in which we prominently printed the Anti-Terror Hotline Number. The Pocket Guide had been produced in consultation with ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers).

Furthermore, during a 'Take Two' debate organised by and printed in The Guardian in September 2004 between the Muslim journalist Faisal Bodi (who at the time was sceptical of the terror threat facing the UK) and myself, I said:

'Both the [MCB] letter and the [MCB Pocket] guide accept that, in the wake of the terrible Madrid train bombings last March, there is an increased terror threat to the UK. We reiterate that averting a terrorist attack in which innocents would be put in jeopardy is an Islamic imperative, and it is the duty of all - Muslims included - to help the authorities prevent such an atrocity.'

Why was this none of this mentioned in the Panorama programme? It cannot have been for lack of time as it was a 'specially extended edition'. It is hard for us to avoid the conclusion that this information was deliberately omitted by the Panorama team because it would have perhaps fatally undermined the 'denial' case that John Ware was trying to build about the Muslim Council of Britain.

b) One voice quoted approvingly in Ware's documentary was Dr Ghayasuddin Siddiqui who was introduced in the programme as being the 'Director of the Muslim Institute'. We were told in the programme by Mr Ware that:

'a decade ago he believed Islam and politics should be fused. Now he thinks the only way Muslims will join the mainstream is if that link is broken.'

Why did John Ware not inform his viewers that Dr Siddiqui is actually far better known in the media as being the head of the so-called 'Muslim Parliament'? Indeed, Dr Siddiqui issues almost all his statements in his capacity as the head of the 'Muslim Parliament'. See for example the following website:

<http://www.muslimparliament.org.uk/>

When Dr Siddiqui makes a media appearance it is also almost invariably in his capacity as head of the 'Muslim Parliament'. Yet, Panorama for some reason described him as the 'Director of the Muslim Institute'. Why was his far more well-known role in the 'Muslim Parliament' not relayed to the Panorama viewers? Could it be that the 'Muslim Parliament' by-line was deliberately omitted because it would have undermined Mr Ware's argument about the need for Islam and politics to not be 'fused'?

In his response to us, the Panorama editor, Mr Mike Robinson, said:

I cannot see the relevance of your point about the Muslim Parliament. As you are no doubt aware, it no longer campaigns for a separate parliament and concentrates largely on civil liberties issues and aspects of life within the Muslim community such as forced marriages.

We find Mr Robinson's answer tellingly evasive.

Furthermore, even a cursory look at the Press Releases section of the 'Muslim Parliament' website reveals that Dr Siddiqui continues to routinely comment on issues of politics from his own Muslim perspective on behalf of the 'Muslim Parliament'.

c) John Ware's Panorama programme presented an on-screen quotation from the late Pakistani Islamic scholar Mawlana Mawdudi (1903-1979) as saying that an Islamic state – which his party Jamaat-I-Islami continues to campaign for - bears:

"...a kind of resemblance to the fascist and communist states..."

The purpose of Panorama quoting this line seems to us was clearly to try and create a certain negative impression in the minds of its viewers about the MCB affiliate, the Islamic Foundation, whose Chairman, Professor Khurshid Ahmad, was shown on Panorama as being a prominent member of the Jamaat-I-Islami party.

It is well known that it is possible through mischievous editing to choose carefully selected words from the writings of just about any author which can then make it appear to suggest he is saying the polar opposite of his actual position. This task is made all the more easier if viewers are shown the writings of a foreign author who was writing in a rather different time and place. What is less well known is that programmes such as the BBC's Panorama would indulge in this kind of manifestly

dishonest practice. Compare the above selective quotation that Ware provided his viewers with the very next few lines from Mawdudi's book, Islamic Law and Constitution:

“Considered from this aspect the Islamic State bears a kind of resemblance to the Fascist and Communist states. But you will find later on that, despite its all inclusiveness, it is something vastly and basically different from the totalitarian and authoritarian states. Individual liberty is not suppressed under it nor is there any trace of dictatorship in it. It presents the middle course and embodies the best that the human society has ever evolved.”
(Islamic Law and Constitution, Chapter on The Political Theory of Islam, 9th edition, Lahore, 1986, p146)

In the lengthier quotation above, it is evident that Mawdudi was actually saying something very different to what the carefully selected quote that Panorama presented to its viewers. Mr Ware's underhand behaviour here reflects poorly both on Panorama and the BBC.

In his response to the MCB, Mr Robinson said that Panorama had not included the latter part of the quotation because:

This claim was one that the production team and I considered as flying in the face of known facts about Mawdudi's own values.

This is a quite remarkable statement. What it seems to be saying is that the Panorama team were fully aware that the fuller quotation would have shed light on what Mawdudi was trying to say, but they deliberately left it out because they thought that Mawdudi was purposefully dissembling.

To us, this incident serves to make it abundantly clear that it is actually Mr Robinson and John Ware's Panorama team that were actively engaged in the dissembling.

d) Ware spoke appreciatively of those Muslims who do not allow their faith to influence their political outlook. He went to a mosque in Birmingham and said that:

‘Muslims here follow the Sufi stream, like most in Britain. They do not politicise their faith, theirs is personal and spiritual.’

It is indeed true that many Muslims admire Sufi teachings. However, Ware did not provide any evidence whatsoever to show that ‘most’ Muslims in the UK follow the ‘sufi stream’ or that they believe that Islam should be ‘personal and spiritual’.

In his response to the MCB, the Panorama editor, Mike Robinson, failed to address this misleading comment by his reporter, John Ware.

Furthermore, the idea that Sufis follow a ‘personal and spiritual’ Islam is another common misconception and shows insufficient research on Ware's part.

The primary anti-colonial jihadist movements of the 19th and 20th century were all sufi inspired. Imam Shamil in Daghestan belonged to the Naqshbandi order, Umar al-Mukhtar in Libya to the Sanusi order, Amir Abdul Qadir in Algeria to the Qadiri order, and so on.

e) Ware stated in the programme that:

'One overt sign of separateness is that of Muslim women covering themselves.'

Mr Ware's bias against Islam becomes clear here. Why is the wearing of the hijab or jilbab regarded by John Ware as a 'sign of separateness'? Did the Muslim women that Mr Ware interviewed say that they covered themselves to be 'separate' or to fulfil their understanding about Islam's teachings concerning modest dress? In addition, we cannot recall Panorama ever describing the wearing of the Sikh turban or the Jewish yarmulka (skullcap) as constituting 'signs of separateness'.

f) Mehboob Kantharia was described at the outset of the John Ware programme as being both a 'founding member' of the MCB and a member of its Central Working Committee 1997-2004. We have looked at our records and can only find him listed as being a member of the CWC from 2002 to 2004. In his response to us, Mr Robinson said that they had obtained information in good faith from Mr Kantharia and Mr Yousuf Bhailok (the former Secretary-General at the MCB). This explanation is not acceptable – if Panorama have stated as fact something which is incorrect then they should clearly apologise for misleading their viewers. My own recollection of Mr Kantharia is of a person who was quite peripheral to the MCB and its workings.

g) In the segment about the Holocaust Memorial Day, John Ware questioned why the MCB only included mention of Muslim countries in its explanation of why the day should be made more 'inclusive'. When Sir Iqbal Sacranie clearly stated that genocide in non-Muslim countries such as Rwanda had indeed been mentioned in our correspondence with the Home Office, Mr Ware said scathingly in a voiceover:

"It's true - the MCB did cite Rwanda - but only after the story broke accusing them of boycotting Holocaust Memorial Day. When the MCB published their letter to the Home Office it mentioned by name only Palestine, Chechnya and Kashmir."

Mr Ware's commentary here was thoroughly misleading. We are attaching to this complaint a letter we wrote to the Home Office on 2nd December 1999 when the idea of a Holocaust Memorial Day was first mooted, clearly citing Rwanda as an example

of why the title of the memorial day needed to be more inclusive and be renamed to, for example, a Genocide Memorial Day. Here is an extract from that letter:

The Muslim Council of Britain suggests that following the Holocaust a number of similar tragedies have befallen humanity. The killing fields of Cambodia, the massacres in Rwanda, the ethnic cleansing and genocide of Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo come immediately to mind. It is no coincidence, we feel, that in recent times Muslims have become the victims of genocide in Europe. (MCB Letter to the Home Office, 2nd December 1999)

As you can see the letter demonstrates that Sir Iqbal was indeed correct when he stated that the MCB had raised the case of the Rwandan genocide previously. It is notable that Mr Ware did not subsequently make any attempt to contact the MCB office to obtain the correspondence that Sir Iqbal referred to. Instead he disgracefully rushed to broadcast a segment in which he sought to portray Sir Iqbal as being untruthful.

In his response to the MCB, Mr Robinson stated:

Your reference to this earlier letter, which to our knowledge had not been published previously, misses the point. In the 1999 letter Rwanda was simply included in Sir Iqbal's response to the Government canvassing the views of faith groups about the idea of establishing a Holocaust Remembrance Day. Rwanda was not cited as a reason by the MCB for boycotting the event two years later - nor was it until, as we accurately reported, the boycott was challenged in January 2005 by the Sunday Times.

Mr Robinson's response here is curious. He seems to grudgingly acknowledge that the MCB had indeed cited the Rwandan genocide as an example of why the name of the memorial day should be made more inclusive, but says that because we did not repeat the mention of Rwanda in some of our later correspondence that this somehow justified his reporter's observations. This is completely unacceptable reasoning.

In fact, Mr Robinson's quite arrogant reply only serves to further exemplify the unfair and biased nature of the Panorama documentary. In his response to us, Mr Robinson claimed that:

I have found there to be no truth in your claims that this programme was dishonestly presented, maliciously motivated or Islamophobic.

We can only hope that after reading the above examples we have detailed that you will come to a rather different and more objective conclusion.

h) On September 7th 2005 we wrote to BBC Complaints department about an item which appeared on the Panorama website. Our letter can be seen at the following link:

<http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/letter110.php>

To date we do not seem to have received a response to that letter. We would ask that you urgently look into this as we still want an explanation into the issues we raised in that letter.

To summarise, we believe that the Panorama programme, 'A Question of Leadership' was a calculated and deliberate attempt to undermine the Muslim Council of Britain through very underhand journalistic means. It is highly regrettable that a programme like Panorama allowed itself to be used for this purpose by those elements that are hostile to British Muslims.

Mr Inayat Bunglawala,
Secretary,
Media Committee,
The Muslim Council of Britain