

THE MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN



Mr Mark Thompson,
Director-General,
BBC,
New Media Building,
201 Wood Lane,
London,
W12 7TQ

11th August 2005

Dear Mr Thompson,

Re: Panorama Edition due to be aired on Sunday 14th or 21st August 2005

Over the past few weeks a number of organisations affiliated to the Muslim Council of Britain have been contacted by reporters from the BBC1 Panorama team who are making a documentary about British Muslim organisations. The documentary is, we understand, due to be aired on Sunday 14th or 21st August 2005.

On Monday 8th August, John Ware – from the Panorama team – came to interview the MCB Secretary-General, Sir Iqbal Sacranie, as part of the documentary.

It is only right that organisations that work in the public sphere are questioned, if necessary, about their activities and the MCB has been openly giving interviews and answering questions about its activities since it came into existence in November 1997 as a national umbrella body. However, from the feedback we have received from our affiliates and the interview that was conducted on Monday, it appears that the Panorama team is more interested in furthering a pro-Israeli agenda than assessing the work of Muslim organisations in the UK.

Remarkably, nearly all the questions that were put to Sir Iqbal Sacranie by the Panorama team were directly or indirectly about Israel. These included questions to do with the Holocaust Memorial Day, Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Shaykh Ahmad Yasin (the former leader of Hamas who was assassinated by Israel in 2004) and statements that have been made by the MCB affiliates, the Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith, The Islamic Foundation and the Muslim Association of Britain concerning Zionism and the struggle for Palestinian rights.

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The BBC should not allow itself to be used by the highly placed supporters of Israel in the British media to make political capital out of the July 7th atrocities in London.

Over the last few years, British Muslims have made some significant progress in participating in mainstream bodies and institutions. It is quite regrettable that at a time when it is of the utmost importance that trust is built between the Muslim communities across the country and the wider society that the Panorama team seems intent on creating mistrust by serving the interests of the pro-Israel lobby and undermining community relations in the UK.

A common assertion in the Muslim community, especially amongst the young is that there is a lack of even-handedness in much of the British media when dealing with Muslim issues. The blatant pro-Israeli slant of the Panorama program will only further that belief, and therefore exacerbate the current situation.

Yours sincerely,

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

CC: Ms Jana Bennett, Director of Television, BBC
Mr Peter Fincham, Controller, BBC1 Television
Ms Glenwyn Benson, Controller of Factual Television