

CBC response to OFIP letter

Dear Mr. Larson;

Thank you for your email sent to the Ombudsman's office but then forwarded to the President of CBC, Catherine Tait, as well as the Editor in Chief of CBC News, Brodie Fenlon. You raise concerns about the coverage by CBC News of the situation between Israel and the Palestinians.

In my capacity as Director of Journalistic Standards, Mr. Fenlon asked me to respond on behalf of CBC News.

In your open letter you wrote:

In the last six months, credible reports have appeared which have been highly critical of Israeli actions. Among others these include:

- *a determination from the [International Criminal Court](#) that there is a legitimate case for investigating alleged war crimes by Israel.*
- *a report entitled “This is apartheid” from [Bt’selem](#), a very credible Israeli human rights organization, arguing that Israel exercises “Jewish Supremacy” over all the territory it controls “from the river to the sea”.*
- *a report from [Human Rights Watch](#), an international human rights organization with impeccable credentials which also claims that Israel is in fact applying an “apartheid-type” regime not only in the West Bank but inside Israel as well.*

You also expressed concern that as of the date of your letter (May 10th) that there had not been sufficient coverage of the situation in Occupied East Jerusalem, and the violence there.

Let me begin by stating that we regret that you felt you needed to write such a letter at all, and the fact that you did take the time and care to do so signals not only the importance of this issue for you but it sends that same message to us as well at CBC News.

As you know, and I'm sure Mr. Halton can attest to as well, CBC News has a long and very credible track record of covering the story of the Palestinians and that of Israel, and the incredibly interesting, complex and at times confrontational and violent relationship between the two populations. We have done so for decades.

In daily news coverage there is always that decision that editors and programmers must make each day: which stories will we cover, and if so how important are those stories inside that daily news agenda.

There is rarely a "right" or "wrong" answer to that question, as most of the time, the decisions are debated and even disputed inside our now virtual newsrooms as part of any healthy conversation about news.

I'm sure you won't be surprised to hear that by far the largest deployment of reporters, producers, investigative journalists, interview chase producers, and current affairs programmers is towards covering the global pandemic and its far-reaching and life-altering impacts across every sector of Canadian life and around the world.

I say that only to suggest that stories are getting "crowded out" on some days by the sheer magnitude of the COVID-19 crisis. Again, Mr. Halton knows well enough how stories can play high on news programs on one day, but fail to crack a lineup on another day, simply because of other things that may be going on. There are other events happening around the world that are not getting the kind of attention CBC News might ordinarily bring, were it not for this pandemic.

So in the case of the three stories you identified, the coverage of or lack thereof was a product of those daily newsroom conversations, handled and decided on by the senior programmers in charge of our TV broadcasts, Radio newscasts and our digital news pages.

I will not try to argue the value or importance of these stories, as I agree with you that they are all worthy of coverage on some level. But at the same time, I have to respect the decisions made in the moment by the various editorial leaders in prioritizing the day's coverage.

I respect as well that you are not suggesting that CBC News take up the cause of the Palestinians, nor would we, and that your message is simply that we must do better - in your view - in reflecting more of the criticism that is out there regarding the state of Israel.

I am comfortable saying that CBC News has indeed reflected criticisms of Israel over the years, as well as the Palestinian leadership too. And we will not be shy to do so in the future.

However, we are hearing from you and have heard from many in the Palestinian community recently that whatever history CBC News has with this story doesn't really matter right now: that there is an urgency among the Palestinian community and its supporters about the current state of affairs.

We have received that message from you and others loud and clear. Since your email Monday, the situation in Sheikh Jarrah has deteriorated, and I hope that you may have noticed a significant uptick in our coverage and prominence across our flagship news programs on TV and Radio as well as online and our daily news podcast, which dedicated a full episode to the situation today.

As well I can tell you that we have sent a team of journalists into the region, and we hope to be able to augment our coverage with some original on-scene reporting in a few days. You can imagine the challenges of working in a dangerous conflict, with the additional difficulties of doing so during the COVID-19 pandemic. It's not easy to move around.

Once, I appreciate you taking the time to make your views known, and please know they have been received with gratitude and have helped shape our editorial conversations this week about the importance of this story.

Sincerely,
Paul

Paul Hambleton
Director of Journalistic Standards
CBC News

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