

**CBC  Radio-Canada**

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**Mr. Michael Bloomfield  
British Columbia**

Dear Mr. Bloomfield:

You wrote initially in January, 2009, during the Israeli invasion of Gaza to complain about a remark made by a journalist from Al Jazeera, speaking on CBC Newsworld. During a report from Gaza, he recounted complaints from the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN that some of their workers were being wounded and killed during operations.

He said: "So the committee of the Red Cross (is) complaining severely its efforts have been hampered, although it is mandated by international humanitarian law and the Geneva Convention." He went on to say that ICRC officials "have told us none of those seem to be applicable here on the ground because any kind of immunity has not been afforded to them. They have obviously been targeted..."

In the first iteration of this interview, the reporter, Ayman Mohyeldin, continued on to report on other aspects of the conflict. In a second iteration later in the morning the interview, now recorded, was clipped after the word "targeted."

You felt that this was "a particularly egregious example of bias in CBC's reporting of the conflict between Israel and Hamas.... I demand that immediately either irrefutable proof is made public or that the CBC make a clear and unequivocal statement on the same show that it does not have such evidence and therefore rejects such claims as unsubstantiated propaganda."

Cynthia Kinch, the Director of CBC Newsworld, responded, saying that she did not share your view, and suggested that you may have misinterpreted what was said. After reviewing the context of the interview she said that "what Mr. Mohyeldin seems to be saying is that the Red Cross paramedics have become targets—objects of fire—"obviously so, since some six have been killed. 'Targeted' used in this way and in this context simply seem to mean they have been shot or shot at. They have not been given protected status and, as a result, in the confusion of front line, close quarters fighting, they cannot be distinguished from Hamas militants and have been shot at or, in the current parlance, 'targeted.'"

She went on to say that “targeted” in the sense of a “deliberate, planned and precision attack” was not the intended meaning here and that Israel has repeatedly said, and “we have reported, that it is absolutely not targeting civilians or aid workers.”

Ms. Kinch agreed with you “to the extent Mr. Mohyeldin could have made that point in clearer or different language. Indeed, Ms. Hiscox might well have asked him to clarify his remarks on that point.”

You rejected Ms. Kinch’s explanation and asked for a review. I am sorry for the time it has taken to get to this.

#### **REVIEW:**

One of the underlying principles of CBC’s journalism is that CBC journalists have appropriate control over its reporting. From time to time the News Service uses non-CBC journalists in areas where the Corporation is not well staffed, or in areas to which they cannot get. Some of these outside journalists serve as commentators or interview subjects; some do reports in the normal manner and would be subject to the strictures of CBC’s Journalistic Standards and Practices, either through their own knowledge of them or through supervising editors.

The Ombudsman is, in essence, the public’s representative inside the CBC. I am required to judge matters against the “Journalistic Standards and Practices,” but not as part of the News Service—more as an ordinary viewer. While I may have some expert knowledge about the craft of journalism, I think it’s important to view material as an ordinary viewer would.

I screened the program segments in question as objectively as I could. One of the crucial questions is whether Mr. Mohyeldin was attributing his comment to the ICRC (or another international agency) or stating it on his own. If he were working as a surrogate CBC journalist, he would have had to fulfill the obligation to prove anything he stated as fact. Were he reporting the views of others, that obligation does not exist.

My first conclusion was that the statement “they have obviously been targeted” was Mr. Mohyeldin’s conclusion. He may have based it on statements from the ICRC or United Nations officials, but it seems clear that, in context, he offered it as a statement of fact.

The next question is the meaning of “targeted.” While the parsing of “targeted” in Newsworld’s response is undoubtedly accurate as far as it goes, I have to fall back on what a reasonable person watching that broadcast would conclude: not that they had fallen victim to random fire, but that they had been deliberately fired upon despite their vests and other identification. Ms. Kinch provided the appropriate context by saying in her note that “what is confusing, particularly in the Middle East conflict, is that the word is also used by IDF and Israeli politicians, particularly, to suggest a deliberate, planned and precision attack.” Indeed.

Since this story fell squarely in the middle of that context, it seems unreasonable to expect a viewer to draw a different conclusion.

That summons up the next question as to whether it was provable. We are now four months from the end of conflict and the evidence is still not clear. As you will know, and as the CBC has reported, the Israel Defense Forces deny that they "targeted" health care workers or civilians. However, the IDF has actually sent out mixed messages on this score. Just a few days after this broadcast, a spokesman for the IDF, speaking on the CBC Radio program "The Current," said that the IDF did not target United Nations workers. When he was asked how UNRWA workers came to be killed, he implied strongly that the IDF considered as hostile those who worked for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. The other charge was that incoming fire was perceived to come from near ambulances and "paramedics" whose role this spokesman brought into question.

The only thing we know for sure is that we do not yet know where the truth lies. You may choose to believe every word spoken by a military force during a conflict. I am saddened to report that more than 40 years of journalism has taught me that that is not a useful position.

What is clear is that the clip you referenced did not meet the standards of CBC journalism. Mr. Mohyeldin needed to offer proof that the claim was true, or the anchor needed to offer context to the statement. Ms. Kinch is certainly correct in saying that Mr. Mohyeldin "could have made that point in clearer or different language."

However, to say that this fault represented a "venomous attack on Israel" by the CBC does not stand up to scrutiny. It is a huge and complicated task to cover such a complex story. It should be noted that Israel barred reporters, including CBC staff, from covering events inside Gaza. I did note that over the course of the invasion, Newsworld made considerable effort to present a wide range of views on the conflict, not the least those of the Israeli government and the IDF.

#### CONCLUSION:

The item did not meet the standards of accuracy and fairness within CBC's Journalistic Standards and Practices. However, I could find no grounds for the underlying charge of bias by Newsworld.

Sincerely,



Vince Carlin  
CBC Ombudsman

cc: Cynthia Kinch, Director, CBC Newsworld  
Esther Enkin, Executive Editor, CBC News  
Jennifer McGuire, General Manager and Editor in Chief, CBC News