

## **RESPONSE TO THE BBC EDITORIAL GUIDELINES CONSULTATION**

### **1) Are the draft Guidelines clear and straightforward?**

Yes, with the exception of **Section 12: WAR, TERROR AND EXTREME VIOLENCE, DISASTER** which is both confusing in its conflicting language within the section, and also contradictory to what we as a British / Western society understand to be a reality and also runs contrary to legislation in English law.

The BBC, for example, states clearly at Sub-section **12.2.2**: *it is important that human dignity is respected without unduly sanitising the realities of war, terror, disasters and similar events.* However, the new draft guidelines also states at **12.4.8** that: *The term ‘terrorist’ should only be used with attribution ie. when quoting or citing its use by others. Content makers should not adopt other people’s language as their own; their responsibility is to remain objective and report in a way that enables audiences to make their own assessments. The BBC should convey to the audience the full consequences of an act by describing the perpetrators as, for example, ‘bombers’, ‘gunmen’, ‘kidnappers’, ‘insurgents’ and ‘militants.’*

It is confusing that on the one hand the BBC instructs that it should not “sanitise” the horrors and effects of terrorism; yet on the other hand, insists that such language should not be used in its news coverage of real events to describe acts that can only be described in fact and law as terrorist acts.

This is evinced most clearly by the recent Israeli-Hamas war that was started by a brutal massacre on an unprecedented scale by Hamas against Israeli civilians on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, and yet in relation to which the BBC has persistently neglected to call Hamas (or indeed, Hezbollah or the Houthis that enjoined in acts of terror against the Israeli public shortly after Hamas’ initial barbaric acts of terrorism) Terrorists. Indeed, the **Oxford Dictionary** defines “Terrorism” as: *The calculated use of violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear. Terrorism is intended to coerce or intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological;* and the British Government (alongside other Western governments and others in the world) have designated such ideological and religious extremist groups as Terrorists under UK law. This is further confused by the same BBC Guidelines which quote the same legislation at **12.3.8** in order to identify who are indeed “terrorists”: *Any proposal to approach an organisation (or an individual member of an organisation) designated a ‘terrorist group’ by the UK Home Secretary under the Terrorism Acts.*

It is imperative that the BBC prioritises what the public know to be true in law and fact and removes the need at **12.4.7** for attribution to report on indisputable terrorism and call it what it is. It is otherwise confusing and unclear to the audience as to what criteria the BBC requires in its reporting, and ultimately undermines public confidence and trust in the BBC.

### **2) Do they set out appropriate editorial standards for those making BBC programmes and content?**

Yes, save for as outlined above.

### **3) Do they sufficiently reflect the changes in the media landscape since the last review in 2019?**

What has been written above is even more important when faced with the multiple sources of disinformation readily available to the public with the use of their smart devices on social media and other less reliable “news” outlets online. The BBC must be a source of trustworthy reporting in order to fulfil its Public Purposes.

Where sources / contributors can be utilised so easily with smart technology, it is crucial that the veracity of such sources and their affiliations is examined critically and any affiliations referenced to enable the public to make informed conclusions on any reporting. The expanded changes to **2.4.17 Contributors’ Affiliations and Supplied News Material** is therefore very welcome.