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Mark Thompson
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25 January 2009

Dear Mr Thompson,

We at ENGAGE have read your [explanation](#) yesterday evening on the BBC website about why the BBC is refusing to allow the Disasters Emergency Committee to broadcast an appeal for funds in respect of the terrible humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

You say there are two main reasons why you have refused to allow the broadcast of the appeal and explain the first reason as follows:

'A few days ago, the DEC approached us about an appeal for Gaza and, after very careful reflection and consultation inside and outside the BBC, we decided that in this case we should not broadcast the appeal. One reason was a concern about whether aid raised by the appeal could actually be delivered on the ground. You will understand that one of the factors we have to look at is the practicality of the aid, which the public are being asked to fund, getting through. In the case of the Burma cyclone, for instance, it was only when we judged that there was a good chance of the aid getting to the people who needed it most that we agreed to broadcast the appeal. Clearly, there have been considerable logistical difficulties in delivering aid into Gaza. However some progress has already been made and the situation could well improve in the coming days. If it does, this reason for declining to broadcast the appeal will no longer be relevant.'

Surely the thirteen major charities that together make up the DEC are in a far better position than the BBC to know whether they can get aid through to the people of Gaza or not. It is, after all, their area of expertise. Have the DEC charities informed you that there is a high likelihood that money donated now will not be effective? If they have not, then why is the BBC attempting to second guess the DEC?

You hold out the possibility that you may review your decision in future if you believe the 'logistical difficulties' in getting aid into Gaza are overcome. As the DEC have decided to launch an appeal now they must evidently be convinced that there are no insurmountable difficulties in getting aid through to the people who need it. Besides, public interest in the DEC charity appeal will naturally decline as Gaza fades from the

headlines - it is important for charities to be able to raise funds when public awareness is high.

You explain your second and more 'fundamental reason' for not allowing the DEC to broadcast their Gaza Appeal as follows:

'After looking at all of the circumstances, and in particular after seeking advice from senior leaders in BBC Journalism, we concluded that we could not broadcast a free-standing appeal, no matter how carefully constructed, without running the risk of reducing public confidence in the BBC's impartiality in its wider coverage of the story.'

As the [editorial](#) in today's edition of The Observer notes, your concern that broadcasting the DEC Gaza Appeal might undermine the public's confidence in the BBC's impartiality:

'...might feasibly be true if it could be shown, or even credibly argued, that the broadcast was anything other than a genuine humanitarian appeal; if there was evidence that the DEC was intent on mobilising people's charitable instincts for some covert political end. But there is no such evidence.'

And as The Independent on Sunday notes in an [editorial](#) today:

'Does the BBC have so little confidence in its reporting that it believes it can be undermined by its providing airtime for a charitable appeal for humanitarian aid?'

You conclude your explanation by saying:

'However, BBC News and the BBC as a whole takes its responsibility to report the human consequences of situations like Gaza very seriously and I believe our record in doing it with compassion as well as objectivity is unrivalled.'

A few years ago, Professor Greg Philo and Dr Mike Berry of the Glasgow University Media Group conducted a study of television news coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Their research [found](#) that on British television, particularly on BBC1, there was a preponderance of official 'Israeli perspectives'. Israelis were interviewed or reported more than twice as much as Palestinians. Because very little or no historical background was usually provided - such as many of the Palestinians having been dispossessed as a result of the creation of Israel and its subsequent wars - in much of the news coverage there was a tendency to present the Palestinians as initiating trouble and the Israelis are then presented as "responding" or "retaliating".

We very much hope that you will urgently reconsider your decision not to allow the DEC Gaza Appeal.

Yours faithfully,

Mr Inayat Bunglawala,
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ENGAGE