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Press Complaints Commission
Halton House
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24th September 2010

Dear Sir,

I am writing in relation to the story featured on the Daily Express front page on Saturday 18th September, 2010, and continued on page four of the paper.

The front page headline announced a 'Muslim Plot to Kill Pope' (URL: <http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/200262/Muslim-plot-to-kill-Pope>), with a sub-heading stating "Bogus street cleaners held". It continued inside with 'Police swoop to foil 'terror attack' on the Pope' (pages 4-5).

The story refers to the apprehension of six individuals of North African origin on suspicion of planning to commit a terrorism-related offence.

The Daily Express in covering the news story opens on the front page with the paragraph:

"Islamic terrorists disguised as street cleaners allegedly hatched an audacious plot to blow up the Pope." It adds that the plot was intended to deal "a double blow to the infidel", although no reasonable evidence is cited by the journalist in defence of the allegation of the men being "Islamic terrorists", nor is there clear indication of whence the claim of a "double blow" is sourced.

In declaring the individuals apprehended as "*bogus street cleaners*" the Daily Express appears to have unilaterally determined their status, inferring disingenuity, with no reference or regard for proof to validate the assertion.

In a further pejorative reference to the ethnic and national identities of the men the journalist adds that "*an investigation is also underway to determine if the foreign nationals had entered Britain legally and were entitled to work here.*"

It transpired that the story was wholly without foundation, something the Daily Express acknowledged in the Monday 20th September edition in a paragraph on page nine stating:

"Six men arrested and quizzed by counter-terrorism police probing a plot in London to attack the Pope were all released without charge, Scotland Yard said yesterday."

I am writing to complain that the Daily Express has in its headline title, sub-heading and article content breached Clause 1 article (ii) of the Editors' Code of Practice on Accuracy and clause 12 on Discrimination.

The paper's assertions were in my view wildly inaccurate and misleading and I would contend that the paper failed to give due prominence to the news of the release of the six men as required by Clause 1 article (ii) which stipulates that:

"A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion once recognised must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence, and - where appropriate - an apology published."

Given that the arrest of the six men was splashed across the front page of the newspaper and given a two page spread on the inside pages (pgs 4-5), a single sentence on page nine of the newspaper does not, in my view, constitute 'due prominence'.

I would also contend that the newspapers allusion to the possible illegal residence of the men in the UK is a discriminatory and pejorative reference to the ethnic identities of all six men, believed to be North Africans.

We at ENGAGE have had numerous reasons to write in complaint to the PCC on stories featured on Islam and Muslims in the Daily Express and the Daily Star, both owned by Express Newspapers. It would seem to us that the frequency with which these sorts of misleading and distorted representations of Muslims appear in the Daily Express is something that requires urgent remedial attention.

I look forward to your adjudication on this matter and on what I believe to be repeated violations of the Code of Practice by the Daily Express.

Yours sincerely,

Mohammed Asif
CEO