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Press Complaints Commission

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Sir Christopher Meyer

Members of the Commission

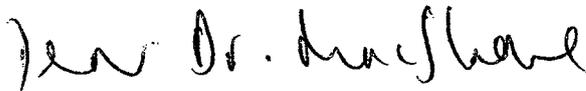
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From the Director

19 December 2005

Rt Hon Dr. Denis MacShane MP
Chairman
All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Semitism
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Director
Tim Toulmin



Thank you for your letter of 2nd December.

As you may know, the PCC is the body responsible for taking complaints under a 16 point Code of Practice. It covers areas such as accuracy, privacy and newsgathering. Of relevance to your inquiry is Clause 12 (Discrimination) of the Code, which says that:

- i) The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.
- ii) Details of an individual's race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story.

The Commission also runs a 24 hour helpline service which advises members of the public and editors alike about the application of the Code in order to reduce the likelihood of it being breached.

As well as setting out the industry's professional rules to editors and journalists, the Code also acts as a charter of rights for individuals who are the subject of press attention. Most of the Commission's complaints are about accuracy and come to us following publication of a story. About a quarter of complaints relate to one of the 8 clauses which relate to the protection of personal privacy. The Commission's chief aim is to resolve any complaints that might raise a possible breach of the Code through the publication of corrections and apologies, or the deletion of offending material from files or undertakings about future conduct. In a very small number of cases – about a dozen a year – where it is not possible to negotiate a suitable remedy for the complainant, the Commission will issue a formal adjudication containing

1 Salisbury Square London EC4Y 8JB Telephone 020 7353 1248 Facsimile 020 7353 8355
Textphone for deaf or hard of hearing: 020 7583 2264
e.mail: complaints@pcc.org.uk website: www.pcc.org.uk



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criticisms of the newspaper which the editor must publish in full and with due prominence.

Complaints under Clause 12 by individuals directly affected by an article are relatively few – and complaints about prejudicial, pejorative or irrelevant reporting of an individual's Judaism are rare. To set the issue in its proper context we have received in 2005 14 complaints where there was a possible breach of Clause 12 – none of these concerned alleged anti-Semitism. However, such complaints do arise from time to time and I am enclosing two adjudications, one upheld and one not upheld, which will help to explain further the Commission's application of the Code in this area. It might be of interest to the Committee to note that there has been no discernible increase in the number of complaints about anti-Semitic reporting in recent years.

In terms of ensuring that the PCC is accessible to all potential complainants, the Commission has a rolling programme of external relations which includes open meetings in towns and cities across the UK, a member of staff dedicated to travelling the country to meet interested parties to explain the Commission's work, a comprehensive website, a lecture programme, and literature available in different languages and formats.

I hope this is helpful. Please let me know if you require any more information.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely

Tim Toulmin

