

More than 100 staff accuse BBC of pro-Israel bias over Gaza genocide

Jean Shaoul

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More than 100 of the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) staff have accused the state broadcaster of pro-Israel bias in its coverage of the Gaza war, in an open letter first seen by the *Independent* newspaper.

The letter, signed by more than 230 figures in the UK's media industry, writers and academia, said the public broadcaster had failed to provide "fair and accurate" coverage of the conflict and demanded it "recommit to fairness, accuracy and impartiality". It was sent to the BBC's director general, Tim Davie.

The 101 BBC staff who signed the letter did so anonymously, with one telling the *Independent* that "so many of us feel paralysed by levels of fear." They added: "Colleagues have left the BBC in recent months because they just don't believe our reporting on Israel and Palestine is honest."

Signatories included Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, a Muslim member of the House of Lords and member of the Conservative Party; historian William Dalrymple; actress Juliet Stevenson; Dr. Catherine Happer, a senior lecturer in sociology and director of media at the University of Glasgow; Rizwana Hamid, director at the Centre for Media Monitoring; broadcaster John Nicolson; and *Guardian* columnist Owen Jones.

They said that the BBC must "robustly challenge Israeli government and military representatives in all interviews," called on the BBC to report "without fear or favour" and to make new editorial commitments, including "reiterating that Israel does not give external journalists access to Gaza; making it clear when there is insufficient evidence to back up Israeli claims; making clear where Israel is the perpetrator in article headlines; and including regular historical context predating October 2023."

"The consequences of inadequate coverage are significant. Every television report, article and radio interview that has failed to robustly challenge Israeli claims has systematically dehumanised Palestinians," they said. The signatories gave the example of a "dehumanizing and misleading headline" relating to Israel's killing of 6-year-old Hind Rajab last

January. The BBC headline read, "Hind Rajab, 6, found dead in Gaza days after phone calls for help." But as the letter explained, "This was not an act of God. The perpetrator, Israel, should have been in the headline, and it should have been clear that she was killed."

Another anonymous BBC staff member told the *Independent*, "Palestinians are always treated as an unreliable source and we constantly give Israel's version of events primacy despite the IDF's (Israel Defense Forces) well-documented track record of lying. "We often seem to prefer to leave Israel out of the headline if at all possible or cast doubt on who could be to blame for airstrikes. "The verification level expected for anything related to Gaza hugely outweighs what is the norm for other countries."

The newspaper cited another as saying they were "losing faith in the organisation [they] work for," having seen a "huge disparity" in the BBC's approach towards Israel. They added: "I genuinely care about the future of the BBC, and every day I see that we are losing the trust of audiences across the world. People are going elsewhere to find the reality of what is happening because we are simply not giving it to them."

Staff pointed the BBC's failure to live broadcast South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice on January 11, while live broadcasting Israel's defence the following day.

The journalists stressed the BBC's "high level of trust" as a taxpayer-funded public broadcaster, warning that its Gaza war coverage could undermine its "impartiality" and puts its "independence at serious risk".

While the letter focused on the BBC, it also drew attention to shortcomings in other media outlets including ITV and Sky. The corporate media consistently plays down Israel's perpetration of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Their journalists refer to the "humanitarian crisis" in Gaza without laying responsibility for it at Israel's feet. At the same time, they constantly refer to the Hamas-led October 7 attack that led to the deaths of 1,200 Israelis, as though that justified the killing of more than 43,000 Palestinians, the

majority of whom are women and children killed in their homes and places of shelter from Israeli bombing. They never reference the Zionist state's 75 years of brutal suppression of the Palestinians as the context for the attack. Insofar as the mainstream media and the BBC mention the words "genocide," "war crimes" or "crimes against humanity," they do so in relation to Hamas rather than Israel.

This is not the first time the BBC's coverage of Israel's US-financed and directed war of annihilation of the Palestinians in Gaza has been criticized. In November last year, just weeks after the start of the war, eight of the BBC's UK-based journalists wrote to *Al Jazeera*, saying the BBC was guilty of a "double standard in how civilians are seen." Israel's war crimes went unreported while the BBC was "unflinching" in its reporting of alleged Russian war crimes in Ukraine. "This organisation doesn't represent us," one of the co-writers told *Al Jazeera*. "For me, and definitely for other people of colour, we can see blatantly that certain civilian lives are considered more worthy than others—that there is some sort of hierarchy at play."

In September, the *Guardian* alleged that some insiders at the Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC)—an umbrella organisation made up of 15 leading aid charities including Save the Children, ActionAid and Tearfund—as well as the BBC and aid agencies had accused the BBC of "blocking" DEC's request to air a major fundraising appeal for humanitarian aid for Gaza because it feared a backlash from supporters of Israel's war against the Palestinians. In the event, the BBC did agree to broadcast the appeal.

In 2009, the BBC was the only terrestrial broadcaster in the United Kingdom to refuse to air DEC's appeal for humanitarian aid for the Palestinians in Gaza. The BBC's then Director General Mark Thompson claimed that airing the DEC appeal would put the corporation's "impartiality" at risk by giving the impression the BBC was "backing one side" over the other. In 2006, the corporation used the same pretext of maintaining impartiality in relation to an appeal for aid to Lebanon following the Israeli war against Hezbollah in which hundreds of civilians died and much of the country's infrastructure was destroyed.

That the state broadcaster supports Israel's barbarity should come as no surprise. The British government is complicit in Israel's genocidal war against the Palestinians, supplying the Zionist state with the weaponry and intelligence to carry out its attacks and stacks the BBC's board with its supporters. In 2021, Boris Johnson's Conservative government appointed Sir Robbie Gibb, a journalist, political advisor and a self-declared Thatcherite Conservative, to serve as a non-executive director on the BBC's board because of his implacable opposition to the

public broadcaster and its supposed "liberal" bias.

In 2020, Gibb headed a consortium to buy out the *Jewish Chronicle* (*JC*) when the loss-making paper was at risk of closing. As the sole director and owner of Jewish Chronicle Media, now turned into a charitable trust, he refused to say where the £3.5 million loan—now written off—for the takeover came from. He sits on the key committee looking at editorial standards at the BBC, whose coverage of Israel/Palestine he lambasts as "biased" against Israel.

His editor at the *JC*, Jake Wallis Simons, is a bitter critic of the BBC's reporting of the war. Two months ago, the paper was exposed as a mouthpiece for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, publishing fake news by a fake journalist that formed the basis for his attempts to massage the news in his favour that are now the subject of scandals within Israel. In an extraordinary intervention even before the start of Israel's October war on Gaza, Gibb tried to impose an "impartiality review" in relation to BBC's coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Despite calls for him to resign his position, Gibb has refused to stand down.

In April last year, Richard Sharp, a banker and Tory donor, resigned as BBC chair after he was found to have breached the rules on public appointments by failing to declare his role in securing a secret £800,000 loan for Boris Johnson, creating a "potential perceived conflict of interest." Johnson, when he was prime minister, had personally approved Sharp's appointment as BBC chair, with the recruitment panel informed that Sharp was the only candidate whom the government would support.



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