

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Additional Estimates Hearings February 2014

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 207

Program No. Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

Hansard Ref: Page 103 (25/2/2014)

Topic: *Four Corners* story 'Stone Cold Justice'

**Senator Ruston asked:**

On a similar topic: you made comments that you always attempt to have a balanced approach and fully report. As you can probably imagine, your *Four Corners* story *Stone Cold Justice* has received a reasonable amount of response in certain sectors of the Australian community, particularly in relation to allegations that the Israeli government had a new policy with the objective of targeting Palestinian children for the purposes of gathering intelligence. It is a pretty strong statement. When that particular story was being researched and filmed, did the ABC seek any clarification from the Israeli government as to whether that statement was factually correct?

**Mr Scott:** I will have to take that question on notice. The program as you would be aware was a joint venture between the ABC and *The Australian* newspaper. I believe it was extensively researched over a period of time, but, on the specifics of that, I will have to take that on notice.

**Mr Scott:** Yes. I appreciate that.

**Senator Ruston:** I understand that Britain's *Independent* newspaper also covered a very similar story along the same lines, but they have subsequently run stories that have retracted a number of the allegations that were made. I would be interested to know whether you were aware of those retractions and, if so, whether the ABC has considered broadcasting similar retractions. The other question is in terms of broader policy. In international affairs there are very significant ramifications of making statements, as we found out at our last estimates with the situation of spying on Indonesia. There can be some massively significant and detrimental impacts on a nation. Given the experience of that and the experience of here, where allegations have been made against a sovereign country—some pretty serious allegations by your network—do you factor in those ramifications at that level, given the level that you are targeting with this particular type of story?

**Mr Scott:** We would be very happy to come back with a detailed answer on notice for you on that.

**Answer:**

During his interview with ABC Program *Four Corners*, which aired on 10 February 2014, Israel's international spokesman, Yigal Palmor, was asked about the apparent targeting of Palestinian children for the purposes of intelligence gathering. Palmor told reporter John Lyons that it was a legitimate practice because such intelligence could help prevent future violent actions. An extended interview with Yigal Palmor is also included on the *Four Corners*' website:

<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2014/02/10/3939266.htm>

In relation to the *Independent*, the newspaper issued an "update" saying it had based its original report on the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI). As this committee subsequently amended its report, the paper decided to do the same, as stated on its website.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications**

**Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice**

**Additional Estimates Hearings February 2014**

**Communications Portfolio**

**Australian Broadcasting Corporation**

*Four Corners* neither based its report on PCATI nor quoted PCATI. Therefore, any change by PCATI did not affect the *Four Corners* report. Rather, *Four Corners* based its reference for this part of the story on *The Jerusalem Post* of 31 December 2013. On 10 January 2014, *Four Corners* independently checked *The Jerusalem Post* story with the office of Israel's Minister for Justice, Tzipi Livni. Ms Livni's office told *Four Corners* that *The Jerusalem Post* article was accurate. A spokeswoman for Ms Livni said that, upon hearing reports that children were kept in cages, Ms Livni telephoned Israel's Minister for Public Security, Yitzhak Aharonovitch, asking whether such reports were true. Ms Livni's office said Mr Aharonovitch made inquiries and then informed Ms Livni that the reports were indeed true. The spokeswoman said upon hearing this Ms Livni ordered an immediate end to the practice, which occurred. *Four Corners* reported that the practice was stopped by Israel.