

**Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Communications, Information Technology and the Arts portfolio

Special Broadcasting Service Corporation

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings 3 and 4 November 2003

Outcome #, Output #

Question: 14

Topic: MIDDLE EAST REPORTING

Written Question on Notice:

Senator Santoro asked:

SBS's Middle East news and current affairs coverage shows remarkable consistency in terms of anti-Israel bias. For example, on 1 June 2003, SBS screened a Palestinian-made film, 'Jenin, Jenin', which was produced by someone who appeared to be a member of a terrorist organisation and has not been shown on regular Western television networks. The film's message was that there had been large-scale and deliberate killings by Israeli forces at the Jenin refugee camp in April 2002.

Yet long before SBS screened this 'documentary', the United Nations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch had concluded there was no massacre at Jenin. Palestinian sources also agree that there were Palestinian casualties in the action at Jenin, but that most of the about 55 fatalities were combatants who were killed in a fierce action in which many Israeli soldiers also died. None of this information was included in the SBS introduction to the documentary.

Why was this information not disclosed and do you agree that without it, screening the documentary was an irresponsible and inflammatory act?

Answer:

SBS does not accept the Senator's broad assertion in the opening sentence about SBS' Middle East news and current affairs coverage.

In relation to the specific question about the program *Jenin Jenin*, attached for the Senator's information is a copy of a letter of a response to a complainant which addresses the issues raised in this question. SBS notes that the documentary *The Battle of Jenin* was broadcast immediately preceding *Jenin Jenin*, and the purpose and effect of this scheduling decision is dealt with in more detail in the attachment.

Further to the matters raised in the attached letter, SBS notes:

- It is not customary for SBS, or, any other broadcaster SBS knows of, to conduct background checks on the producers, directors or writers of programs that are acquired.

- According to recent reports, the Israeli Supreme Court recently overturned the Israeli Film Board's decision to ban the film *Jenin Jenin* in Israel.

Taking into account the above matters, SBS does not agree with the Senator's description of the act of broadcasting this program.