

December 9, 2009

Dear Editors and Producers of the People & Power program:

The ultimate purpose of a true journalist is to inform the reader, to bring him each day a letter from home and never to permit the serving of special interests. It is within those reasons that many viewers like myself have trusted Al-Jazeera for a reliable and credible source of information over the years. It deeply saddens me to see your network fall into the genre of opinion based networks that only care about inflating stories for the mere purpose of ratings rather than the quality and fact behind the story.

On Wednesday December 2, 2009 you aired a segment titled, "The Mystery behind Eritrea" a segment that was fabricated from beginning to end. Instead of utilizing facts and figures, your journalist decided to use exaggeration of every kind to make her story seem far more plausible.

Sinéad O'Shea turned to false information and images to titivate her story, a story that was lacking the journalistic discipline of collecting, verifying, reporting and analyzing information gathered regarding her allegations.

**Through viewing of the documentary a list of false statements were observed, they are as follows:**

1. "...Eritrea was the largest source of refugees in the world..."

***FACT***

- According to UNHCR, countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka are all listed way above Eritrea.

2. ".....little has been done to develop Masawa after the war" In actuality a lot has been done to develop, Masawa. some of the many examples are,

***FACT***

- The Northern Red Sea Regional Museum which was opened in 2002. It mainly focuses on protection, conservation and awareness of marine resources. It contains distinct fish, corals, shells and turtles, skeleton of a whale and dugong, as well as traditional fishing traps.
- Massawa International Airport which was constructed and opened On August 25,2003.

3. "...All of Eritrea's money and energy is devoted to the military. Whose feats are celebrated every night on TV." First of all, the footage she used to justify her statements were of Ethiopians soldiers proudly dancing elevating the Ethiopian Flag.

***FACT***

***Eritrea also spends majority of its money on Healthcare and Education.***

- The Orotta School of Medicine, which began its educational program in 2004 with 32 medical students, has now grown fivefold to around 180 medical students. Last week the first 32 students graduated.

- Compared to the number of health care facilities built in Eritrea by successive colonialists (Italians, British and Ethiopians) during their more than 100 year long occupation, the Government of Eritrea, in just the last 17 years, has built more than all of them put together. 13 new hospitals, 19 new health centers and 112 new health stations have been constructed all over Eritrea
  
- Eritrea won broad acclaim and was cited as an exemplary nation at the recent (May 2008) Burkina Faso International Conference on Basic Health Care for its success in reducing child and maternal mortality as well as for reducing incidents of malaria by 90%. Eritrea has also eradicated polio and neonatal tetanus measles.
  
- Eritrea is also receiving global acclaim for its successful interventions and primary care treatment. It has also met the Millennium Development Goals for reducing incidents of HIV and Malaria by 2015 as well as reduced child mortality and improved maternal health

There are countless facts for every false accusation made by your journalist, but listing them would be useless. The only mystery behind this documentary is Sinéad O'Shea motives. In the future it is highly important that you advise your journalist to be honest and maintain integrity, as she is a direct reflection of what Al-Jazeera stands for.

Hopefully this mistake will be recognized and corrected immediately to a retraction and an apology.

Sincerely,

Fenan Russom