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## **RESPONSE BY THE INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING TRUST (IBT) TO THE BBC'S SERVICE LICENCES CONSULTATION**

**April 2007**

### **Background: IBT**

The International Broadcasting Trust (IBT) is an amalgamation of two sister organisations: the former Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project (3WE) and former International Broadcasting Trust (IBT). The new IBT is an educational charity which seeks to promote high quality television and new media coverage of matters of international significance. In the past, 3WE has been active in this area and this submission fully reflects 3WE's long history of campaigning on these issues and arguing that international coverage on television is a necessary tool in informing us all, as global citizens.

IBT represents a coalition of international charities. Its members include: ActionAid, Amnesty International, British Red Cross, CAFOD, Care UK, Christian Aid, Comic Relief, Concern UK, Friends of the Earth, Merlin, Oxfam, Plan UK, Practical Action, Progressio, RSPB, Save the Children, Sightsavers International, Skillshare International, Tearfund, UNA UK, UNICEF UK, VSO, the World Association for Christian Communication and World Vision. IBT is a registered charity, number 326150.

The views in this submission reflect the concerns of IBT's member agencies regarding adequate common understanding of the world in which we live. These concerns are shared by millions of UK supporters of our organisations. IBT's members, being intimately and operationally concerned with the effects of 'globalisation' on communities and environments around the world, and with communicating across the world, welcome the advent of the global information society (GIS).

IBT's argument, reflected in all our policy work since 1997, is that television coverage of the developing world should not just focus on images of suffering. Our view is that, as UK citizens, we are all at the same time citizens of a global information society. We have needs, rights and interests in being informed and educated about both our own society and that wider international society of which we are part. This is especially so now that it is readily apparent that events and processes in the wider world have both direct and indirect effects on how we live our lives. September 11<sup>th</sup> has taught us all that -- even if we should already have been aware of it through HIV/AIDS, global warming, environmental degradation, international migration, the integration of world trade and the migration of jobs and services.

Every area of our lives has the potential to be profoundly influenced by events and processes on the international level, and not just the local, regional or national levels. So being informed and educated about the world; being able to participate as citizens in democratic debate about our own and our country's role in the world; being empowered to engage in dialogue and make connections with people and communities around the world – all these are becoming part of the basic 'tool kit' of citizenship.

It is IBT's view that an international dimension should be an integral part of all programming. If that were the case, then there would be a greater blurring of boundaries and distinctions in the BBC's general programming, between so-called 'domestic' and 'foreign' subject matter.

Likewise a channel such as BBC1 should not be defined as 'mainly domestic' – that is, as mainly excluding 'foreign' subject matter, but should equally be capable of showing a landmark programme about the global environment or a drama set in a developing country.

Since 1989-90 IBT/3WE has conducted monitoring research on the way the main public service TV channels cover international subjects in their non-news-and-current-affairs (Tier 3) programming. We have drawn many of our conclusions from this significant body of research material.

Our most recent research report, 'Bringing the World to the UK', was published in June 2006. It was commissioned from Professor Steven Barnett at the University of Westminster and the research and conclusions within it were produced independently of IBT/3WE. It examines both news and non-news factual international output on the main five TV channels during 2005 and compares these to data going back to 1975 (for news) and 1989 (non-news).

## **DIALOGUE**

Finally, we would like to note that in the past the BBC has shown considerable willingness to engage in dialogue on the matters noted above. IBT has been given the opportunity to present our research results to senior managers.

Following that dialogue the BBC is engaged in a series of high-level seminars led by Jana Bennett the Director of BBC Vision, designed to look at the vast and rapid changes occurring in developing countries and the way in which the developing and developed world are increasingly interconnected. The seminars also engage creative and commissioning staff in brainstorming new ideas for broadcast programmes.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the BBC Trustees and the team managing this consultation to discuss the points we make in our submission further.

## **SUMMARY OF POINTS MADE**

Understanding that we are commenting on whether the Service Licences accurately reflect current output, we will focus our comments on BBC1, BBC2, with reference to BBC3 and BBC4 because our concern is output which reaches mainstream audiences. We will also focus primarily on the purpose remit **Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK** since this is our area of concern and expertise.

It is IBT's view that the Service Licences for BBC1 and BBC 2 do not accurately reflect current output with regards to the international content they are showing. The Service Licences for BBC 3 and BBC4 are accurate in this respect. In recent years there has been a significant amount of programming concerning the wider world and international affairs on both BBC1 and BBC2 and it is our understanding there is a significant amount planned for the rest of this year and next year. BBC4 is the only Service Licence to include a Condition on the purpose Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK and this does not accurately reflect current output.

IBT notes that there is a classification of the different public purposes in the Service Licences from *'very important'* to *'important'* to *'should play its part in contributing to this purpose amongst its audience'*. This classification demonstrates a clear prioritisation of the six public purposes and from this classification IBT is disappointed to observe that Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK is a consistently low priority. We question why this is the case when recent, current and planned output show it to be a priority.

While this consultation asks whether the Service Licences accurately reflect what is on air now, rather than what should be on air, IBT is concerned that if the new Service Licences are simply variations of the current Service Licences then the public purpose to Bring the UK to the world and bring the World to the UK will be neglected because in the current Service Licences it is consistently presented as the lowest priority, despite, as stated above, this running counter to the hours of programming concerning the wider world which has been recently transmitted.<sup>1</sup>

In our opinion there will need to be significant changes made to the current Service Licences in order to reflect the importance of this public purpose. Specifically, it is IBT's view that more conditions are required in the Service Licences for this contribution to public value in order to reflect current output.

While we concede that BBC Three's Service Licence is accurate in presenting what is currently on air, we question whether the channel can seriously fulfil its obligation to Bring the world to the UK through its news and current affairs output which consists of 60 second bulletins.

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<sup>1</sup> At the Stakeholders meeting in January 2007, David Liddiment stated that the new licences will simply be 'varied' from the current licences.

## **ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS POSED IN CONSULTATION**

### **Question 1**

When reading the Service Licences do you recognise the BBC's services, as they are currently provided, from the description of their characteristics and other features? (Please answer with reference to specific Service Licences where possible.)

Focusing our comments mainly on BBC1 and BBC2, we do not agree that the Service Licences accurately reflect what is currently on air.

From IBT's most recent research, *Bringing the World to the UK*, it is clear that there has been more international coverage in recent years than is implied by the Service Licences for BBC1 and BBC2. In 2003 BBC1 and BBC2 showed 99.4hours and 178.4hours respectively of international programming. In 2005 BBC1 showed 157.5hours and BBC2 showed 297.8 hours.<sup>2</sup>

### **Past Programming**

Some recent examples of programming with international content include:

The whole *Africa Lives on the BBC* Season, much of which was shown on BBC1 and BBC2. We welcome the ambition in the *Africa Lives* season to use drama (*Holby*, *Girl in a Café*) and entertainment (*Strictly African Dancing*) to reach a mass audience which might not otherwise be interested or attracted to programming about Africa

*Planet Earth*, *Tribe*, *Storyville*, *This World*, single documentaries on BBC2, *The Trap* which is at its heart internationalist, and *Tsunami*.

*Panorama* and *Newsnight* show consistent ambition to be international. Out of 10 *Panoramas* transmitted this year, 3 have covered foreign subjects. In 2006 out of 34 programmes, 7 were international. Notable examples of foreign *Panoramas* include *The Killers* (2004) when Fergal Keane returned to Rwanda, and *Never Again* (2005) which focussed on the situation in Darfur.

The current season marking the bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade in the UK is a prime example of international programming which is being shown across all channels and platforms.

The documentary *From Russia with Love* and *Africa Kicks* season are examples of international programming which has appeared on BBC3.

### **Planned Programming**

We understand that the following programmes/seasons are planned for the future:

A climate change season is planned for later in 2007 which includes *Planet Relief*  
An Indian Season is planned, again for 2007

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<sup>2</sup> *Bringing the world to the UK*, published by IBT June 2006

A China season is planned we believe for 2008

Peter Kosminsky's drama series about aid workers and peace keepers is in production and we believe planned for transmission peak time on BBC1.

Howard Brenton's series on China is in production

Nick Fraser's *Democracy Series* is also in production

In addition to individual examples of programmes which cover international issues, IBT notes that the impact of cross- channel/platform bunching or 'seasoning' of programmes is not reflected in the Service Licences because they only refer to single channels. It is IBT's view that individually therefore they cannot reflect the true impact these seasons have.

#### **Question 2**

Does each of the Service Licences for the digital services properly reflect the original service approvals? If you are a user of BBC services, does the way in which they have been defined make intuitive sense to you?

In the case of BBC3 and BBC4, which is where our focus lies in responding to this consultation, the Service Licences for BBC3 and BBC4 do properly reflect the original service approvals.

#### **Question 5**

Is the Key Characteristics section in each Service Licence sufficiently comprehensive? Or are there other characteristics of the service which are significant enough to be included? (Please bear in mind that any change to them would require the Trust to consider carrying out a Public Value Test.)

#### **BBC One – Remit**

IBT argues that in order to make it consistent with recent levels of international programming and planned international programming BBC1's Remit should read: *"it should reflect the whole of the UK and the wider world in its output"* rather than just *'reflect the UK.'*

#### **BBC Two – Overview of aims and objectives**

On the basis that *'bbc two should deliver its remit with factual programming that broadens horizons'* and in order to be consistent with recent levels of international output we believe there should be more mention of the public purpose of Bringing world to the UK in this overview. The only reference to this public purpose currently is: *'The channel should ensure that its factual, music and arts output reflects international themes and it should show high quality, non-UK output across a range of genres'*. This obligation

allows for foreign, imported material to be shown, possibly providing alternative perspectives from the wider world, but in our opinion it needs to be more explicit because it could refer to content from other English-speaking Western cultures such as the US or Australia, which would not accurately reflect either current or planned output.

We would urge that an aim is included in this section for BBC 2 “*to broaden horizons through coverage of other countries outside the UK and the English-speaking world, across all genres including drama, arts, business, comedy, documentaries and current affairs.*”

**Question 6**

As a user of BBC services, does the approach the Trust has taken to defining service budgets seem to offer an acceptable level of accountability for the BBC's spending?

In IBT's view this approach offers an acceptable level of accountability for the BBC's spending.

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**Question 9**

Do the Conditions listed in section 5 of each Service Licence, reflect the types of output which are most important to that service? (Please make reference to individual Service Licences, where possible.)

We find this question confusing. How does one judge which types of output are most important to each service?

On the assumption that the meaning of the question is ‘are the Conditions adequate to reflect the type of output which is currently on air’, then we argue that they are not. On the basis of evidence presented in the answer to Question 1, IBT argues that international content is a vital element currently for both BBC1 and BBC2, reflecting the UK as part of a wider world. We therefore urge that extra Conditions are included in the Service Licences for BBC1, BBC2 and BBC3 to reflect current output.

BBC 4 already has a condition on the purpose remit of Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK, therefore this Service Licence does reflect current output accurately.

**Question 10**

Having regard to recent actual output in these areas, does the level of these Conditions appear appropriate? (If not, please offer examples of Conditions, consistent with the recent output of the service to which the service should be subject. Again, please make reference to individual Service Licences where possible.)

It is IBT's view that the level of Conditions in the service licenses for BBC1 and BBC2 are not appropriate. From IBT's most recent research, it is clear that there has been more international coverage in recent years than is implied by the Service Licenses for these two channels. In 2003 BBC1 and BBC2 showed 99.4hours and 178.4hours respectively of international programming. In 2005 BBC1 showed 157.5hours and BBC2 showed 297.8 hours.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to this data which provides an overview, we have listed above in answer to Question 1 details of sample programming which has been recently shown on BBC1 and BBC2 and also programming which we understand is in production or scheduled for transmission later this year or next year.

On the basis of this evidence, it is IBT's view that there should be Conditions which apply to BBC1 and BBC2 regarding their coverage of international affairs – across all genres which would be consistent with the recent and planned output of both channels.

**Suggested Additional Conditions:**

BBC1 - a minimum number of 6 *Panorama*'s should focus on international subjects each year.

BBC1 - international programmes should be included in paragraph 5.3 (Promoting education and learning) as part of the 650 hours of new factual programmes

BBC1 - programming featuring countries outside the UK should feature under paragraph 5.4 (Reflecting the UK's nations, regions and communities) in order to reflect the current output which relates to the UK's Asian-origin ethnic minorities

BBC1 - there should be a Condition in paragraph 5.5 (Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK) to broadcast a minimum number of hours of peak time as well as non-peak time programming featuring the wider world, as is consistent with planned programming over the coming 12 months.

BBC2 – international programmes should be included in paragraph 5.1 (Promoting education and learning) as part of the 500 hours of new factual programmes as is consistent with planned programming over the coming 12 months.

BBC2 – International current affairs should be included in the Condition in paragraph 5.3 (Sustaining citizenship and civil society) as is consistent with planned programming over the coming 12 months.

BBC2 - programming featuring countries outside the UK should feature under paragraph 5.4 (Reflecting the UK's nations, regions and communities) in order to reflect the current output which relates to the UK's Asian-origin ethnic minorities

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<sup>3</sup> *Bringing the World to the UK*, published by IBT June 2006

BBC2 – There should be a condition in Paragraph 5.5, relating to Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK, to broadcast a minimum number of hours of programming (to be determined) concerning the wider world, as is consistent with planned programming over the coming 12 months.

BBC3 – The Condition in Paragraph 5.2 (Promoting education and learning) should include knowledge-building programming which **features the wider world**.

**Question 11**

In addition to the metrics included in the Public Value framework (Reach, Quality, Impact and Value for Money and metrics for the five content characteristics), are there any other performance measures which the Trust should use to monitor individual, or all, BBC services?

In IBT's view the metrics included in the Public Value framework are adequate.

**Question 12**

Do you think the Trust should approve the changes being proposed to these services, as listed in Figures 4 and 5, in this document? If not, please give reasons, being as specific as possible.

It is IBT's view that the Trust should approve the changes being proposed to these services, with the exception of one change.

IBT believes that the dropping of new factual knowledge-building programmes on BBC3 to replace the news will seriously undermine the level of factual programming on BBC3 which we believe is already a weak element in the channel's programme mix. This change would be less damaging if, with reference to paragraph 5.2 in the BBC 3 Service Licence, the condition is upheld to broadcast at least 50 hours of new factual, knowledge-building programmes each year but we would propose that these have to be **in peak time** so that they are not 'buried' in the schedule.

## DECLARATION

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Please note that we may still refer to the contents of responses in general terms, without disclosing specific information that is confidential. We will exercise due regard to the confidentiality of information supplied.

### DECLARATION

I confirm that the information I have submitted is a formal consultation response. It can be published in full on the BBC Trust website, unless otherwise specified, and I authorise the BBC Trust to make use of the information in this response to meet its legal requirements. If I have sent my response by email, the BBC can disregard any standard e-mail text about not disclosing email contents and attachments.

Name Signed (if hard copy)

Sophie Chalk.....