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RESPONSE BY THE INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING TRUST (IBT) TO THE BBC'S PURPOSE REMITS 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 Vion. 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 11th 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.

very 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

While we recognise that the six public purposes should not be seen as entirely separate aims but as parts of a whole whose boundaries necessarily overlap, in this submission, we primarily focus on the purpose remit, Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK since this is IBT's area of expertise.

IBT welcomes the broad definition of Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK: *"you can rely on the BBC to provide internationally respected news services to audiences around the world and you can expect the BBC to keep you in touch with what is going on in the world, giving you an insight into the way people live in other countries."*

However we believe that Priority 2 needs to be explicit in specifying the genres in which coverage is included in order to reach a mass audience, including specific reference to drama, comedy, documentaries, entertainment, features, educational output and sports coverage.

We also believe this purpose remit does not provide enough of a challenge in that there appears to be little or no ambition to engage a **mass audience at peak time** in matters outside the UK.

Finally, we do not consider the methods to monitor and measure the BBC's delivery of this purpose remit to be adequate. We believe there should be explicit conditions for this purpose remit in the individual licenses for BBC1, BBC2 and BBC3 and these conditions, combined with the proposed attitudinal research, would be used to provide a more accurate measurement .

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS POSED IN CONSULTATION

Question 1:

How well do you think the BBC is currently delivering the Purpose Remit priorities? Are there any priorities that the BBC could deliver better (and if so, why) and are there any priorities which you think are being delivered well (and if so, why)?

Since our expertise is not in the area of how well the BBC delivers its priority in providing news and current affairs for an international audience, we will not refer to this priority.

Priorities 2 & 3 – To enhance UK audiences' awareness and understanding of international issues & broaden UK audiences' experience of and exposure to different cultures from around the world.

We believe that in 2004, 2005 and 2006 the BBC has delivered well on these priorities – providing high quality, accessible, engaging programming featuring countries outside the UK. This content has not only been transmitted in news and current affairs slots but also in peak time drama, features and sports output on BBC1 and BBC2.

Examples include much of the material of the *Africa Lives* Season which appeared on BBC1-4, *Africa Kicks* (BBC3), *Planet Earth* (BBC1) *If* (BBC2), *From Russia with Love* (BBC3), to name only a few non-news programmes. 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. In our most recent research, the amount of factual international programming on BBC1 has risen by 59% since 2003. For the first time in 2005, BBC2 broadcast the largest volume of factual international programming, a third of total output across the public service channels. 13% of BBC2's factual international output was 'harder' programming, most of which was shown in peak-time.¹

Additionally, some of the most interesting and memorable current affairs programming has come about when it has concerned subjects off the current news agenda and the stories have been international. Examples include *The Killers* (*Panorama* 2004) and *Never Again* (*Panorama* 2005).

Looking ahead, we are disappointed to note that it appears there is no longer the ambition to deliver this purpose remit to a mass audience. For example, as far as we are aware, there are no programmes in the upcoming India Season on BBC1. This continues a trend which has been apparent since the *Africa Lives* Season, with the notable exception of the *Holby* storyline set in Cambodia and the Tsunami drama.

¹ Bringing the World to the UK – IBT/3WE 2006

The only significant failing we perceive in delivering these priorities in the past was in providing a limited range of voices – and not focusing on those from abroad. For instance, to illustrate the point, using Bob Geldof to present *Geldof in Africa* in the *Africa Lives* Season presented an outsider’s perspective when a local voice might have provided a more surprising point of view. It is our view that the BBC does not provide sufficient opportunity across its mainstream programming for unmediated voices from the developing world. It is surprising, for example, that in the debate about the future of Africa, UK voices rather than African voices predominate.

Question 2:

Do the priorities need amending in any way? If so, how?

We believe Priority 2 needs to be amended.

It currently reads ‘*The BBC should provide high quality coverage of global issues in its news and current affairs and other output for the UK*’.

We would strongly urge that this purpose remit is amended to include explicit reference to the genres in which coverage is included in order to reach a mass audience.

We propose it should read as follows: *Enhance UK audiences’ experience of and exposure to different cultures from around the world. The BBC should provide high quality coverage of global issues in its news and current affairs and other outputs such as drama, comedy, documentaries, educational output and sports coverage*. This is the wording as seen in Annexe II² of the purpose remit, so it doesn’t run counter to what is being stated, it simply makes it more explicit. In order to engage viewers we believe the ambition has to be encouraged to provide content about the wider world in **all** genres.

Additionally, this rewording would better support the desire of audiences for *improved coverage of international issues, including through genres other than news and current affairs*³

² BBC Public Purpose Remit: Bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK. Annexe II, para 1, Scope of the Public Purpose

³ BBC Public Purpose Remit: Bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK. Annexe II, para 3,ii Priorities Rationale

Question 3

Are there any important priorities that have been missed?

No

Question 4

Do the Purpose Remits present the BBC with enough challenge in promoting the Public Purposes? If not, how might they be improved?

'The content of the BBC's UK public services must be high quality, challenging, original, innovative and engaging, with every programme or item of content exhibiting at least one of those characteristics' (BBC Charter 2006)

Using this statement of the BBC's role as the criteria, it is IBT's view that the purpose remits do not present the BBC with enough challenge. In the main body of the purpose remit for Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK there is no evidence of ambition to engage a mass audience in matters outside the UK on the main BBC channels.

Later it is stressed in Annexe II (paragraph 2.2) that there is a 'public service imperative for the BBC to make UK audiences aware of international issues, cultures and viewpoints. This should be achieved through the provision of **engaging** content across a wide range of genres and across all BBC platforms.'

It is evident from this statement in the Annexe that the intention is to find innovative ways to engage both new and established mainstream audiences with international content, yet this is not explicit in the purpose remit itself.

IBT believes that there are several audiences for international content - Implicit in the phrase 'bringing the world to the UK' is the sense that the information needs to be brought to the audience, that the audience won't be attracted to it voluntarily. This reflects a widely-held view that many people are not interested in information about the world outside the UK. It is true that there is a significant audience which will not automatically come to programming about the wider world. This audience is more likely to be attracted by celebrities, drama or by innovative formats. However, there are others who may be interested already, and they need to be provided with greater depth. There are also specific groups, ethnic minorities especially, who may know more about the countries and stories

being covered because their families originate from the countries where they have been sourced, who again will need even more depth.

Different audiences require different approaches, but all audiences welcome innovation and authenticity.

IBT recommends that in order to fulfil the ambition for programming to exhibit one of the essential characteristics as specified in the BBC Charter, the purpose remits should be more explicit on the point of engaging a mainstream audience.

IBT urges that the following sentence is included in Priorities 2 & 3: *'In order to reach a mainstream audience engaging international content should be provided across a wide range of genres and across all BBC platforms, including BBC1 and BBC2.'*

Question 5

In addition to the measures included in Annex I to each Purpose Remit, are there any other performance measures which the Trust should use to monitor the Purpose Remits?

On the basis that the BBC Trust has an obligation to *'define suitable performance criteria and measures against which the effective promotion of the public purposes will be judged;*' (BBC Charter paragraph 24.2.b).

IN the Agreement (5.3.b) each remit must specify how the BBC's performance against them [the remits] will be judged, in relation to how the BBC promotes its Public Purposes in accordance with article 5 of the Charter (the BBC's mission to inform, educate and entertain). '

We do not consider the quantitative measurements of viewers' perceptions which are proposed to be adequate on their own as a measure of the BBC's delivery of this purpose remit, Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK.

While viewers' perceptions of their information take-up or the availability and quality of programming is highly valuable, it is IBT's view that this research needs to be combined with either extra conditions relating to this specific purpose remit in the channel licenses or more specific details in the purpose remits as to the methods of measurement.

Question 6

Do the priorities adequately reflect the requirements of the Charter and Agreement?

In the Agreement it states that *'the trust must, amongst other things, seek to ensure that the BBC makes people in the UK aware of international issues and of the different cultures and viewpoints of the people living outside the UK through news and current affairs and other outputs such as drama, comedy, documentaries, educational output and sports coverage'*. (Paragraph 10.a.)

It is IBT's argument that the ambition for international programming to be seen across all genres is explicit in the Agreement and in the Annexes to the purpose remit for Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK, yet it is not explicit in the purpose remit itself. Referring back to our points made in answer to Question 2, we urge that the purpose remit is more specific about the genres in which international programming should appear.

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.....