

Channel 4
International Briefing
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Welcome

Kevin Lygo

Director of Television

Although we have many internationally-based programmes, we do not promote them enough, or receive enough credit for them from the outside world. You will be surprised by the volume of programmes we have, and how they are on the increase. Countering the example set by other broadcasters, we have decided that a significant number of people are interested in international stories and events, and so have increased what we are doing here.

The News and Current Affairs Perspective

Kevin Sutcliffe

Commissioning Editor, News and Current Affairs

I. **Review of Last Year**

It is a great time for international Current Affairs on Channel 4. Our output is expanding, primarily directed through the 20 *Unreported World* programmes and the 32 *Dispatches* broadcast last year. The channel is committed to outstanding international reporting. This week, we won five Royal Television Society (RTS) Awards. If we can meet our objective to have 40 *Dispatches* a year, eight of those shows should be international investigations. Those investigations currently underway are highly ambitious, with the biggest subjects and targets imaginable.

[Video presentations]

In January 2005, we decided on what we thought was important and to what subjects we would keep coming back. Torture was a big theme last year, as was Iraq and the War on Terror. Outside of those, you saw Hurricane Katrina and North Korea pushing themselves to be commissioned. We have a separate commitment to a liberal, human rights agenda; *Hard Cash* was an extraordinary film to produce, and was very dangerous to those involved in making it. The story of Katrina was not being covered by the news in the way we saw it, which was about race and class in America. We commissioned that with five weeks' notice, producing an extraordinary portrait of what happened in New Orleans and its relevance to the entire country. Sorious Samura's *Living with AIDS* film, as part of our polemical agenda, was able to say uncomfortable and

difficult things about the world. This quality distinguishes us from the BBC. Likewise, *Unreported World* allows us to cover important stories that have been taken off the agenda.

Next year, Iraq and the War on Terror will remain the issues of biggest political importance. We find people able to report in a real, raw and unmediated way, and are keen to find new faces to tell the stories we do not yet know. We confront the controversial: for example, we had one story reporting Muslim anti-Semitism, and another programme arguing *Globalisation is Good*. We have a wide range of reporting voices wandering the globe for *Unreported World*.

II. Perceived Gaps

What we have missed, and what I often find most difficult, is keeping in touch with what is about to happen. Last year, I did not expect to see the Chinese Premier being escorted down The Mall on the wrong side of the coach, out of sight of the demonstrators. We missed a trick there; on the night he met the Queen, Channel 4 should have broadcast something showing what China is really like.

III. Opportunities

Extraordinary rendition was the subject of a debate in the House of Commons yesterday. That this channel is able to put on pressure to make films that live beyond their transmission is important to us and our collaborators. Going forward, we will be looking at the same big themes, trying to find places where we can advance bravely. We are about taking risks.

This year and next, we also want new faces and voices, with different visions of and opinions on how things should be reported. The Current Affairs commissioning team is accessible 24 hours a day and is happy to entertain your ideas.

The Religion Perspective

Aaqil Ahmed

Commissioning Editor, Religion

I. Achievements

[Video presentations]

For the channel, Religion provides an understanding of the world in which we live. We do not look at historical religious dramas, or methods of worship; we look at what gives us a unique take on the world. The Karbala programme showed the Ashura festival happening for the first time in Iraq following its 30-year ban. That was an incredibly expensive project illustrating that we will take the kinds of risks to make programmes that no one else would consider making. *Where was God?* was another programme of which we can be proud, looking at how everyday lives can cope with dramatic events.

II. Opportunities

We are looking for more of the same – ideas that reflect their subject matter, tell us what we need to hear, show new faces and open up new areas.

The Documentaries Perspective

Meredith Chambers

Commissioning Editor, Documentaries

I. Achievements

It is an exciting week for Documentaries, as we have a new boss, Angus McQueen. Angus has been synonymous with some of the finest international documentary series for a long time – most notably *The Last Peasants* and *Cocaine*. For Channel 4, he has raised the bar on what is possible for international documentaries, sending out a strong message about what the department is interesting in and open to. Although this may be a department best known for *Wife Swap*, *Faking It* and *Supernanny*, we want to continue to be known for our international work, too.

[Video presentations]

Those clips are all very political, but highly personal. Documentaries has a broad interest in and for the world around us; a key point of difference from what Current Affairs do is that we try to bring those stories to the viewer in a way that examines the micro-detail of people's lives.

II. Bringing International Issues Home

Dying for a Drink envisions a world that commodifies water, a tomorrow of scarce resources where water will be the object of greater conflicts. That is brought to life through the story of Leno, a man who walks a mile down the cliffs of El Alto, Bolivia, for dirty water, from which he ekes a living washing the clothes of his neighbours. Leno lives hundreds of yards from a water-processing plant. He has to tell his daughter that that beautiful water is not for her. In a tiny moment, we ask the question if there is a universal right to free water, a question asked with emotion but without anthropology.

Hamburg Cell shows a brave attempt to personalise a question few of us can understand: why did 9/11 happen? Our story of Gaza, and why individuals are determined to stay put, became a more personal story than the abstract reports of the newspapers. *Cocaine* showed how the drug goes from leaf, to Brazilian peddler, to the tables of the clubs of the West End.

III. Forthcoming Films

More4 is an interesting space for us, too. Coming up we have a personal attempt to examine events in China by tracing the man who put the flower in the gun in the tank in Tiananmen Square. Also, there is a powerful film set in a Cameroon court, called *Citizen Law*. Phil Grabsky is looking at a school in Angola where, through

music, the children of the country try to come to terms with what has happened in the recent past. Another film is about the 638 attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro over the last 40 years. On the one hand, it is a funny and unmissable story; more importantly, it tells us about state-sponsored terrorism, and shows that there are other ways to address the theories and arguments of current affairs.

IV. Strategy Going Forward

We need to ask ourselves how to look at the issues in the world around us, and if there are other areas we should be investigating. The most successful films do not look at where the world has stood still, but wonder what will happen in the future, and where we can do something about it. Recurrent themes have to be reinvented. We want these series to play at nine o'clock, because we want them to be watched and not ghettoised. They should not be acts of duty; they should have a broad reach that satisfies our creative ambition to be curious about the world and what it is becoming.

The More4 Perspective

Katie Speight

Commissioning Editor, More4

I. Ambitions

More4 launched in October 2005. I hope we were clear from the outset that we wanted More4 to have a strong international flavour. Including acquisitions and pre-sales, 50% of our documentaries will and have been international. Unlike some other broadcasters, they are not made up of cookery, travel and snorkelling, but are about politics, conflict and the environment.

[Video presentations]

Those were clips about Greenland, Russia, South Africa and Kurdistan. We have also shown a documentary from Argentina, a film called *Paris in Flames*, one from India and an extraordinary documentary about a Bulgarian mental institution.

II. Opportunities

Digital TV was supposed to offer us more choice, but much of it is made up of football, repeats and acquisitions. The type of line-up More4 offers makes us a more interesting alternative. Programming on Channel 4 is intelligent, original and tells us something about the world in which we live. This year and next, we are spending on some big monthly events. That might be a big drama or a feature documentary, or a season of programmes like *The Bloody Circus* on Iraq.

I am determined to extend our reputation for acquiring the best documentaries available on the international marketplace. We have committed to commissioning around 12 international documentaries. I am asking for producers to come to us with even more ideas that have a modern, questioning and original take on the world,

and am keen to find new people passionate about going to a country – not necessarily people with an endpoint, but people knowing why they are going.

III. Commissioning

Current Affairs, Religion, Documentaries and other departments look to commission programmes into More4. Choose which department is the best sponsor for your idea, and they will bring them to us. None of our programmes would be out of place on Channel 4, but we now have more time and space to do more of it.

Summary

Stuart Cosgrove

Director, Nations and Regions

All of those talks reiterated our:

- Emphasis on a strong and compelling narrative;
- Desire for new voices and new storytellers;
- Surprising routes to narratives and perspectives on the world in which we live;
- Consistent questioning of conventional assumptions about society;
- Commitment to exceptional creative authorship.

Questions from the audience

Question 1

When choosing documentaries, how do you decide that a story has a strong narrative?

Meredith Chambers

In *Dying for a Drink*, we were interested in the subject. We looked at telling it in a way that made it intimate and human, and found one individual from that wider interest. It does not always work that way. Some of our domestic documentaries, current affairs and religion films, can be acts of faith. We do not always invest in safe bets, but will invest in germs of ideas. Some ideas might not be fully commissioned until the human story has been found. We are prepared to take risks because the prize is worth it.

Stuart Cosgrove

The Department for International Development (DFID) Fund could be one source for development funding when something is difficult or internationally complex. Is there less potential in Current Affairs to find ways of making things happen when you are looking for narratives that work in a specific British context?

Kevin Sutcliffe

A lot of our international programming is co-funded, a lot with America and some pre-sales programmes with Europe, but we usually manage the editorial process and drive the idea. There is a complex series of relationship the company and I have with our sources of money. Co-funders tend to be happy to let us lead editorially. The difference between what we transmit here and the American version is very little. We have not had to not do anything for want of money.

Aaqil Ahmed

Sometimes you have to be brave, as many American broadcasters do not want to invest in the programmes I want to make. If the ideas are good enough, we will find the money. *Karbala* was fully funded by us, but everyone else wanted to buy it when it was finished. If the idea did not feel that strong initially, we would not have taken that risk.

Katie Speight

It can work both ways. I became involved in a film I saw that was made in Argentina, even though it had not come to me as an idea initially.

Meredith Chambers

We have to keep as open-minded as possible, as we hear a lot of ideas. In Documentaries, there are few ideas that balance breadth of appeal with telling us something new and surprising.

Question 2

Are you motivated by the number of viewers or the impact an idea will have on a wider audience or the press?

Meredith Chambers

It is important the programmes are watched. You could argue that the success of *Supernanny* made it possible to play all those more challenging prime-time films, but it is more true to say that we are interested in good ideas for difficult films to be shown in prime time. *Hamburg Cell* made a big noise and made people think twice. It was a brave decision that paid off. Kevin Lygo backs ideas that we think can tell people about the world.

Katie Speight

It is about range. *Supernanny* pays the mortgage; the international documentaries gain critical claim. Some programmes tick all the boxes.

Aaqil Ahmed

It is also about our pride in Channel 4's ability to put difficult programmes at the heart of the schedule. We are not just judged on our ratings, but the impact we have. If the opinion formers in the world know a great story exists, they will write about it. That compensates for the fact that it does not get you 5 million viewers.

Stuart Cosgrove

How do you look to find the balance between what you commission?

Kevin Sutcliffe

Dispatches plays nearly 40 times a year. Those shows have to meet certain goals. For me, it is not a trade-off. I want more people to watch it; it has to be noticed; it has to feel cheeky – something nobody else will do. When planning the year, we target areas that we think will be important. You know you want a spread with a certain percentage of foreign reporting – some of which is ambitious, some of which is smaller and intricate. We report the voices and experiences that are not heard elsewhere on British television. You tend that balance as the year goes on to ensure the range of programming is maintained. *Supernanny* is important because of what it does on its own terms; it is more an interplay than a trade-off.

The DFID Fund

Sally-Ann Wilson

DFID Fund Executive, Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA)

It is significant that Channel 4 want to take this opportunity to stimulate further creative discussions about the many new voices in the world that sometimes struggle to be heard. Following the success of programmes like *Sex Traffic*, it has been exciting to hear the direction the commissioners intend to continue taking Channel 4's international coverage.

In the past, many of you have accessed funding from the CBA DFID Broadcast Media Scheme in order to develop ideas and produce taster tapes. It is a way to bridge funding, enabling you to go out anywhere into the developing world and research ideas without incurring financial risk. We had 120 projects across the UK, with a commissioning success rate in excess of 50%, and I am delighted to announce that we have received funding for another three years.

I would encourage you all to work more closely with NGOs, and seek more unusual international co-productions. Our only condition before applying is an indication of possible broadcast interest. It is very important that you speak to potential commissioners in the first instance so that they are aware you are approaching us about funding – there may be some instances in which the broadcaster would rather fully fund the development themselves. Increasingly, we are aiming to support drama, entertainment, comedy and children's initiatives, to provide context to the news and current affairs coverage.

Untold Stories: New Voices

Stuart Cosgrove

Director, Nations and Regions

One criticism that might be directed at television is that it can be an industry arrogant about its knowledge, presuming that its version of the world is the truth. The next session brings together three diverse speakers with different perspectives to discuss their ideas of where untold stories might emerge.

Untold Stories: India

Alpesh Patel

Trader, Entrepreneur and Investment Writer

I. Background

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has appointed me to find exceptional intellectual property from India and bring it back to the UK. For example, we are looking at nanotechnology software that allows missiles to go further more accurately and nuclear reactors to cool more efficiently. I also sit on the private banking division of India's largest bank, which, if quoted, would be the 24th-largest company on the FTSE 100.

II. Lesser-known Facts

One in six people on this planet is Indian. India is the world's largest democracy. More Indians voted in the last general election than all the people who voted in every British election combined since the Second World War. By 2050, India is predicted to be the third-largest economy in the world. It was once the richest country in the planet, until the British arrival in the early 17th century. It is currently the fourth-largest economy in the world, with 22 Indian companies listed on the London Stock Exchange.

India has the second-largest pool of scientists and engineers in the world, and is the largest English-speaking nation in the world. There are approximately 800 million Hindus in India – the world's oldest religion. The four religions born in India are practiced by 25% of the world's population. The Indian President is Muslim; the Prime Minister is Sikh; the Defence Secretary was Christian. The equivalent in Britain would be a Catholic monarch, which is constitutionally forbidden, a Hindu Prime Minister and a Muslim Defence Secretary. India also almost had a white, female, Catholic Prime Minister.

We will see many more Indian multinationals but, with the Indian face of capitalism, they will be more community-based. They will be billion-dollar enterprises, raising money in the West to buy Western businesses and know-how, as they already do. They use the West to market and sell, but keep the brainpower and creative skills in India, as it is not a place of low-cost, non-creative labour. India is essential for economic growth and the maintenance of the quality of life in this country, because this country is relatively

expensive and low-skilled, and is ageing. The flow of Indian skill and costs fuels Western economic growth. A large chunk of HSBC's recently announced profits came because they have branches throughout India.

III. The Future

Have India got what it takes? The world's first university was established in Taxila in 700 BC; Budhayana was the first to calculate pi; Indians developed quadratic equations in the 11th century; the decimal system was developed there in 100 BC. Nothing I have seen suggests they have got any stupider.

It will undoubtedly be the case that India gains a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. In 1999, India sided with the US on UN votes less than 22% of the time; by comparison, Russia voted with the US 46% of the time. In the last 1,000 years, India has invaded no other country; in the last 200 years, the US has not had a decade without being at war.

India has the world's second-largest Muslim population but, unusually, a secular, democratic, capitalist constitution. If there is to be the clash of civilisations, it might be that India can credibly bridge the East with the West. An Indian superpower will not be a country willing to project economic and military might, but can be an honest, unaligned adjudicator. Who else could do it? Unlike the US, there is no impulse to impose democracy, neither could India turn to theocracy or communism.

Untold Stories: China

Dr Linda Yueh

Fellow of Economics, Pembroke College

I. China's Emergence

Why has China arrived on our doorsteps and television sets? Officially, China has 1.3 billion people. That figure is definitely undercounted, as the census is based on 1% on the population, and the one-child policy means rural families do not report the number of children they have. Together, China and India account for a third of the world's population.

At number four, China is now economically larger than the UK. At current growth rates, China will become the world's second-largest economy in the next two decades. We notice China for the same reasons we notice the US. It is big, powerful and influential. In the past 20 years, China has contributed as much if not more to the growth rate of the world as the US.

We have a remarkable pace of economic growth in China, but also tremendous social change. China is a communist state becoming a market economy. It is a rich country but has a per-capita GDP below \$2,000. Many people live in poverty and suffer all the problems of a developing country, with the aggregate statistics hiding the nuances behind the problems inside China. Understanding China should not be based on extreme issues; the issues are complex because the country is in transition.

II. Possibilities for Programmes

Think of me as the test audience. A narrative for change could be looked at through an individual view. Policy issues are more easily understood by asking people how they have affected them. Here are some questions to begin asking:

- Where do the communist leaders live?
- How are there 68 million people in the Communist party?
- Why can a Chinese person buy a car now?
- How can you litigate in a country where 98% of the judges have no legal training?
- How is religion secularised?
- Are they becoming more like us? Are they driven by materialism or Confucian values?
- What is China's impact on the UK?
- What will it mean to live in a world with two superpowers?
- What is Britishness if the UK is truly international?

Untold Stories: Africa and Latin America

Albert Tucker

Former Managing Director, Twin and Twin Trading

I. Ambition

I have been impressed by the ambition in what I heard earlier; it made the world seem large to me. I want now to bring you down to the space between the stories of the individual and the larger collective.

I am a bit of a coward; I hate pain. There is a risk you face if you do not feel pain because pain warns you if something is harmful to you. Everything Twin Trading has done that was worth any good we were told we could not do, so it has been difficult to listen to somebody saying that something is not possible. Deciding to do something, we must remember.

- Poor people in the world are deeply impatient with those in the rich world.
- Our children will be deeply impatient with us when they ask us: what did you do when the environment was being exploited?
- We all compete on our differences, but what connects us with the rest of the world?

II. Some Stories

We have to remember the different voices of the countries in which we work. I travel around Africa and Latin America listening to the voices of poor people.

I was in Tanzania three days after 9/11 talking to a poor farmer on a hillside. I was disturbed by the celebrations in Palestine at the time, and told this farmer I could not understand them. He could; he had seen people in London on the TV walking around looking up at the sky, and for one day he knew that we felt how he felt: we were not sure that tomorrow would be the same as today. That is a voice I want to hear more.

An organisation in Peru is encouraging farmers to respond to the market, to part own the products we buy. Gas was discovered in a coffee-growing area there. These raggedy, poor farmers had the confidence to meet with their politicians to ask them what they were going to do with the money the gas would make. These farmers told me they had forgotten what politics was about, pushing for commercial goals, instead of social.

Africans I talk to tell me they are sick of the corruption in politics, but do not know what to do with it. The same is said by the young people I talk to in schools here. We are making a mistake in thinking young people are not political; they want to talk to people and change this world in a different way. They talk a different language and do politics differently. They are consumers and understand that power, but we do not hear them. Capture those voices please.

What is fascinating about the media in this country is that it can hold politicians to account. I am amazed that I never see African finance ministers scrutinised. No poor African accepts anymore that they can see us on TV living the MTV lifestyle, whilst we tell them to tighten their belts and not to ruin the environment. They want to say the same things to our youngsters.

Questions and Answers

Stuart Cosgrove

What film, which has to work on prime-time British television, do you passionately want to make?

Albert Tucker

In Sierra Leone, there is a culture of dependency on NGO financing. People are paid to sit in a training workshop. One group I came across delivers CDs on bicycles – the most complete distribution system in the country, but not recognised. They see themselves doing this until they obtain a ‘proper’ job, but they are the best entrepreneurs I have come across. They have never taken money in aid, and I suspect many of them were child soldiers. I want to tell their story, because many of the people who end up taking up arms are frustrated businesspeople.

Linda Yueh

I cannot begin to imagine the difficulty of bringing these stories to prime time, but I can tell you an issue that would be fascinating to follow. There is a slice of Chinese society that is always missed out – the migration

story. China is undergoing the largest migration in human history at the moment, which is entirely linked to the country's economic and institutional changes. You could imagine following a farmer, whose land has been confiscated, who is unable to settle in urban areas because he does not have the right to reside, buy a home or school his children. The migrant worker sleeps in the dorms, in the factories, or goes abroad only to be sent back. Some become wealthy in Shanghai; some are the victims of industrial accidents; some return to the land, which will again be taken from them, restarting this cycle. Who is this floating population of an estimated 200 million people?

Alpesh Patel

When I was at school in India, everyone stopped to watch a particular badly made programme. Around a TV screen would crowd 20 people for a series with an audience that cut family and economic lines. They were watching the *Mahabharata* – a religious and mythical Indian tale. It must have been the most popular programme ever seen, despite its very low production standards.

There are many non-resident Indians moving from Silicon Valley to Bangalore and Hyderabad finding it comfortable and easier than living and doing business elsewhere. That does not surprise me anymore. India needs supporting; if people like me who are born here did not, who else would look after these people or bring the money back?

Participant

How do you suggest approaching the issue of African corruption, and its links with the West?

Participant

Are our agendas in the West so US-centric that the window with which we view the rest of the world is reduced?

Albert Tucker

Some of the issues we are trying to tackle cannot be approached from a British perspective. Growing up visiting Nigeria, everybody read four or five newspapers, because they all told a different story. If you can hear the story in between, you will have a better idea of what happened. New voices and ordinary people's stories help you get that picture right. It is impossible to define Britishness, for example, because there are so many different aspects that shape society. Corruption can only be defined if we come at it from different levels. This should not only be done through current affairs, as drama can permit a positive possibility beyond the mess that we are already in.

Participant

How do you see India's avoidance of political alignment having an impact?

Alpesh Patel

The Nehru policy for staying unaligned was partly an ideal to show the world a third way, apart from Western alignment and communism. India was positioned for alignment with Russia through the US's close relationship with Pakistan, and Russia's willingness to sell India all the arms she wanted. Indians were frustrated by their socialist policies inhibiting the natural entrepreneurship of the people on the ground – a

tendency shared with American people. There is a natural closeness between American and Indian business communities but, politically, alignment was inhibited by the Cold War, and that America needs Pakistan because of the War on Terror. However, America seems to be its own worst enemy with their legislation preventing Indians from emigrating. America also is unwilling to compete globally, which can only be of benefit to Britain here.

Linda Yueh

China should be covered by television in the way that we cover our own domestic people and policies. Anything we normally think relevant is relevant with Chinese characteristics.