[GB] BBC Trust Upholds Decision Not to Broadcast Gaza Crisis Appeal

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The BBC Trust has decided not to overrule the decision of the Corporation's Director-General refusing to broadcast an appeal from the Disasters Emergency Committee (representing 13 leading UK aid agencies) seeking donations for humanitarian relief for the residents of Gaza. The appeal was broadcast by the other public service broadcasters (though not by Sky).

The Director-General had argued that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is deeply divisive and that the suffering of civilians plays a central part in the political case each side makes in the "court of world opinion". It was thus impossible to separate the political causes from their humanitarian consequences. The appeal, by its very nature, would have shown only one aspect of the conflict and broadcasting it, according to the Director-General, would have implied a significant level of endorsement by the BBC of the appeal itself. This would have put the BBC's impartiality at risk, as required under its Agreement with the Secretary of State which sets out the applicable regulatory rules.

The refusal to broadcast the appeal was highly controversial and over 40,000 complaints had been received by the BBC. However, the Trust decided that it was not its role to second-guess decisions of the Director-General and that he had acted correctly and reasonably throughout, given the importance of preserving the BBC's reputation for impartiality. The decision not to broadcast the appeal was within the parameters of reasonable decisions open to him and he had taken proper advice before reaching the decision.

In view of the public concern over the matter, the Trust asked the Director-General to explore any wider lessons from the episode through discussions with the Disasters Emergency Committee and to take a view on whether the BBC's agreement with the Committee was still appropriate to today's conditions.

Summary Decision by the BBC Trust Regarding the DEC Gaza Appeal, 19 February 2009

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/appeals/dec_gaza_decision.html

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