[FR] Al Jazeera Legally Commits to not Showing Video of Toulouse Murders

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France has been through a national tragedy, with the murder of three children and their teacher outside a Jewish school in Toulouse on the morning of 19 March 2012, coming just days after attacks resulted in the death of three soldiers in nearby towns. The killer was quickly identified and located; he had barricaded himself inside his home, where he was killed by police on the morning of 22 March, after more than 32 hours of negotiation with no result.

At the same time, the Paris headquarters of the news channel Al Jazeera received an anonymous letter, postmarked 21 March 2012, claiming responsibility for the murders. The envelope contained a USB flash drive showing a video montage of the murders in Toulouse and Montauban, filmed by the killer using a mini-camera strapped to his body at the time the murders were committed, with the headline “Al Qaeda attacks France”. Along with each 25-minute video were indications of the place, time, identities and ages of the victims, written in red in capital letters. On 27 March 2012, the public prosecutor applied to the courts under the urgent procedure to prevent the channel from broadcasting the content of the recording in any form whatsoever. In a second summons on the same day, the victims’ families applied for a court order to have all copies of the film and digital media showing the crimes seized, and for the channel to be required to pay a reserve provision of EUR 100,000 for each proven showing.

At the hearing, the channel Al Jazeera and its representative stated that they had on their own initiative handed the flash drive over to the French police but had made copies of its content, one of which had been sent to their management in Qatar, while others had been left in a safe place at their offices in Paris. They also asked the court to note firstly their undertaking to hand over all the copies made - apart from the one sent to their management in Qatar - to the judges carrying out the investigation, and secondly their undertaking to refrain from broadcasting or passing on the content of the files on the flash drive and its duplicates in France and elsewhere. Taking note of these undertakings, which it accepted, the public prosecutor dropped all its complaints. In a judgment delivered on 28 March 2012 under the urgent procedure, the court endorsed this agreement between the authorities and the channel and noted that the proceedings brought by the victims’ families were therefore unnecessary.

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“In accordance with its code of ethics and in view of the fact that the videos do not add any information that is not already in the public domain, Al Jazeera will not broadcast their content”, a spokesperson for the channel explained in a brief communiqué, after stating that the channel had refused a number of requests from other channels that wanted copies of the videos.

TGI de Paris (ord. réf.), 28 mars 2012 - Le Procureur de la République, S. Sandler et a. c. Al Jazeera Channel et Z. Tarrouche

Regional court of Paris (urgent procedure), 28 March 2012 - Public Prosecutor, S. Sandler et al. v. Al Jazeera Channel and Z. Tarrouche

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