[GB] Ofcom Fines TV Channel for Broadcasting ‘Duty to Kill’ Speech by Islamic Scholar

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On 5 July 2013, Ofcom (the Office of Communications) fined a British TV channel more than GBP 100,000 after it aired a lecture by an Islamic scholar who said Muslims had a ‘duty to kill’ anyone who insulted the Prophet Mohammed.

The Manchester-based DM Digital channel was found to be in breach of Rule 3.1 of the Broadcasting Code which says that “material likely to encourage or incite crime or lead to disorder must not be included in TV or radio services”.

DM Digital broadcast the programme "Rehmatul Lil Alameen" on 9 October 2011. It featured a live lecture in Urdu by an Islamic Pir (a religious scholar) who discussed the shooting of Punjab governor Salman Taseer, who had been a critic of Pakistan’s blasphemy law, which carries a potential death sentence for anyone who insults or is judged to have blasphemed against the Prophet Mohammed.

The scholar can be heard telling his audience: “ I hail those who made [Pakistan’s blasphemy law] which states that one who insults the Prophet deserves to be killed - such a person should be eliminated.” He adds that it is a “duty…to kill those who insult Prophet Mohammed”.

Ofcom concluded that a “reasonable interpretation” of the scholar’s remarks was that he was personally advocating that all Muslims had a duty to attack or kill apostates or those perceived to have insulted the Prophet.

DM Digital accepted there had been a breach of Rule 3.1 but said in representations that it was a live lecture, the scholar had never expressed such views before and it had taken a ‘robust’ view by reporting the matter to the police.

The channel was fined GBP 85,000 and was also ordered to broadcast a statement publicizing Ofcom’s findings and was banned from repeating the programme. In considering whether DM Digital’s licence should be revoked because of the seriousness of the breach, the regulator took account of Articles 9 and 10 of the 1998 Human Rights Act (relating to freedom of thought and expression) and decided it would be disproportionate to revoke the licence at this time. But due to previous compliance issues, the regulator added that it was putting DM Digital on notice, and planned to visit the channel in order to improve its understanding of

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compliance as well as continue to monitor it closely.

The channel was also criticised for two other programmes which Ofcom said offered a "one-sided" view of political violence in Karachi and singled out remarks by the channel's chief executive, Dr Liaqat Malik, for criticism.

The programmes, broadcast on 25 Nov 2011 and 4 Dec 2011, made allegations about the governing party in the Sindh Province, the Muttahidi Qaumi Movement (MQM), NATO and the US Government without offering alternative viewpoints. Added to that Dr Malik expressed views on the coalition government of Pakistan, a matter of political and industrial controversy in Ofcom's view.

For breaches of Rule 5.4 (excluding expressions of the views of the person providing the service) and Rule 5.5 (due impartiality), the channel was fined GBP 20,000.

Ofcom's Findings on Rehmatul Lil Alameen and POAF

http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/enforcement/broadcast-bulletins/obb205/obb205.pdf

Sanctions: Rehmatul Lil Alameen, 5 July 2013

http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/enforcement/content-sanctions-adjudications/Rehmatul-DM-Digital.pdf

Sanctions: POAF, 5 July 2013

http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/enforcement/content-sanctions-adjudications/DM-digital-POAF.pdf

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