

Broadcasting Board of Governors Corrects the CBS *60 Minutes* Story About Alhurra Television

A segment about Alhurra Television that aired Sunday night on the CBS program *60 Minutes* distorted facts about the station's audience research, its coverage of Israel, and its editorial practices.

"*60 Minutes* unfairly portrayed Alhurra, which is watched by 26 million Arabic speakers in the Middle East each week," said James Glassman, until recently the Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), which oversees all U.S. international broadcasting, including Alhurra. Glassman now is Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. "Independent research tells us that Alhurra is relevant to people who value its balanced news and information about the region and about the United States."

60 Minutes dismissed the facts about Alhurra's audience - research conducted by ACNielsen, the respected firm that does similar research for CBS and others. Instead the program gave credence to less relevant opinion polls. (Details about Alhurra's extensive audience research are available online in our Other Reports section at [Radio Sawa and Alhurra TV: Performance Update](#).)

This independent research indicates that Alhurra has the largest weekly audience of any non-Arab broadcaster in the Middle East, up from 21 million in 2006 to 26 million today. In the strategically critical countries of Iraq and Syria, Alhurra's weekly reach rates are 56 percent and 55 percent, respectively. A majority of viewers find Alhurra's broadcasts to be credible: 90 percent of Egyptian viewers say that Alhurra is "very" or "somewhat" trustworthy.

The CBS segment claims that Alhurra displays a pattern of anti-Israel rhetoric. To support its conclusion, *60 Minutes* cited a single comment from one of three guests on a live hour-long talk show that aired on May 18, 2008. The Alhurra program was focused on President George W. Bush's speech at Sharm El Sheik that morning, which Alhurra broadcast live.

The discussion panel consisted of a Palestinian journalist, an Egyptian journalist and an American Middle East expert, Kenneth Katzman of the Congressional Research Service. When the Palestinian journalist veered off topic criticizing Israel in harsh terms, the program's host steered the discussion back to the original topic and directed a question to the American analyst.

"While Alhurra, unlike some other Arabic-language networks, seeks a tone of moderation in all broadcasts, we cannot control every word said in a live program," said Jeff Trimble, executive director of the BBG. "If we tried to do so, we certainly would not be a model of free press in the democratic tradition. Our aim, in daily debates such as this one, is to show different sides of an issue, even if we don't agree with them."

In its segment, *60 Minutes* linked a recent comment by the Palestinian guest with serious programming lapses that occurred 18 months ago, including coverage of a speech by a leader of a terrorist organization. Alhurra acknowledged then that it had violated its policy of not providing a platform for terrorists and has since taken numerous steps to tighten oversight to prevent a recurrence.

60 Minutes also failed to note that an independent review of Alhurra conducted recently by the Office of the Inspector General for the Department of State and the BBG showed that Alhurra had implemented editorial controls that the BBG promised to Congress following the earlier editorial lapses. *60 Minutes* was provided a copy of the report but regrettably chose not to include it in their story.

Alhurra provides objective news and information about a wide range of issues and points of views. Unlike other Arab networks, Alhurra regularly presents the full perspective of Israeli issues. Alhurra frequently features Israeli government spokespersons as well as reports by Alhurra's Jerusalem correspondent.

"The BBG's commitment is to live up to the highest professional journalistic standards, and to provide for the open communication of ideas in the Middle East and around the world," said Glassman.

The *60 Minutes* segment also stated that Alhurra failed to terminate the contract of a correspondent involved in an editorial lapse more than a year ago. Alhurra did terminate its relationship with the reporter; however the reporter continued to file reports for Radio Sawa. Radio Sawa now has ceased to use the reporter.

The Broadcasting Board of Governors is an independent federal agency which supervises all U.S. government-supported, non-military international broadcasting, including the Voice of America (VOA); Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL); the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa); Radio Free Asia (RFA); and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (Radio and TV Marti).

For more information, call the Office of Public Affairs at (202) 203-4959, or e-mail <mailto:pubaff@voa.gov>.