

PRESS RELEASE

Ofcom vindication for Al Jazeera over Palestine Papers

The UK broadcasting regulator Ofcom has ruled that Al Jazeera English did not breach any broadcasting rules in its coverage of the Palestine Papers—the largest leak of confidential documents records in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The resounding verdict comes after a complaint by Dr Saeb Erakat on behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Dr. Erakat alleged unfair treatment and invasion of privacy, among others, when Al Jazeera revealed its world TV exclusive from January 23-26, 2011. A special website was also created (www.transparency.aljazeera.net) to display the more than 1,600 secret documents which detail the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks over the past decade.

The papers included high-level minutes of meetings involving the US, European, Israeli and Palestinian Authority (PA) officials. They dominated the global news agenda when released as they evidenced how the Palestinian Authority had offered unprecedented land and security concessions to the Israelis, including the "biggest Yerushalayim in Jewish history", going much further to accommodate Israel than the public had ever known.

Saeb Erakat, chief negotiator for the PA, resigned following the revelations on February 12. Responding to his charge that his own privacy and that of the PLO had been breached, Ofcom found that "the public interest outweighed this expectation [of privacy] and considered that the obtaining and use of the material was warranted".

Ahmad bin Jasem Al Thani, Director General of Al Jazeera, said:

"This is a resounding vindication of our journalism, our decision to release the papers, and our handling of it. We recognize that presenting this volume of information was bold for a television channel. However, the worldwide positive reaction to the series, and this latest judgment, shows that we handled it in an informative and responsible manner.

"Ofcom's decision on the claim of an infringement of privacy is a particularly important one. It is the job of journalists to challenge the decisions taken by people in positions of public accountability, and to shine a light in the corridors where important decisions are being taken."

[END]

Notes

Summary of Ofcom's findings:

- Material facts in relation to the negotiation meetings looked at in the programmes were not presented or omitted in a way that resulted in unfairness to Dr Erakat.
- The use of dramatic reconstructions of negotiation meetings was not inappropriate and did not result in an unfair portrayal of Dr Erakat.
- Dr Erakat was given an appropriate and timely opportunity to respond to the criticisms of him in the programmes. Although he did not participate, his position (and that of the PLO) was included in the programmes.

- To the extent there was an infringement of privacy in relation to obtaining and using documents, the infringement was warranted, given the significant public interest, both in the Middle East and globally, in the issues looked at in the programmes.