

CJPME's statement of support to CRTC's Notice of Consultation 2009-254

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East



June 5th, 2009
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1. Re: Notice of Consultation CRTC 2009-254 - Call for comments on the proposed addition of Al Jazeera English to the lists of eligible satellite services for distribution on a digital basis

2. As President of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME), I am writing to voice our organization's full support of Al-Jazeera English (AJE) being broadcast here in Canada. As we have seen media broadcasters get larger and more consolidated, we have experienced less and less of the broad range of perspectives and objective journalism that Canadians deserve when they tune into their newscasts.

3. CJPME welcomes debate and the airing of all perspectives on important issues, and we are encouraged by AJE's application to broadcast its digital signal in Canada, as it has done in over 100 countries in the world to an audience of over 140 million since it started in 2006.

4. CJPME was established in 2002 by Canadians who want to foster justice, peace, prosperity and security for all peoples of the Middle East. Our mission is to enable Canadians of all backgrounds to promote justice, development and peace in the Middle East, and here at home in Canada. We evaluate the circumstances and events in the Middle East according to three beliefs: the belief that all positions should respect international law; the belief that violence is not a solution; and the belief that all parties in a conflict must be held to the same standard. We are a pan-Canadian organization, with close to 13,000 adherents in all provinces and territories. Our constituency is ethnically diverse; we have adherents from all faith backgrounds and both official languages.

5. CJPME has been very effective in informing Canadians in general and Members of Parliament specifically, about the facts surrounding events in the Middle East. Our outreach to federal political parties has resulted in providing them with the information they have needed to issue more accurate, fair statements about the situation. In short, CJPME, and its supporters, are a growing voice for justice, prosperity and peace in the Middle East.

6. In light of the breadth and diversity of our constituency, we feel compelled to make the following statements:

- Many in our constituency feel that existing Canadian news fails to capture the broad range of perspectives that exist in any news story, focusing more on a Western cultural perspective. We believe that AJE will inject the perspectives that are lacking;
- Our constituency has expressed disappointment in the quality of spokespeople who are interviewed by newscasters. We believe AJE will pursue and feature articulate, well-informed people that will properly represent the perspectives being shown;
- Our constituency has observed that Canadian coverage of international news stories often are not followed up on, beyond the "front page" appeal. We believe AJE will provide Canadians with in-depth follow-up on stories of interest, long after they fall off the front page;
- Our constituency perceives that our current media do not challenge our elected officials enough on positions and comments they make on international matters. We believe that AJE will provide Canadians with additional insight into our elected officials positions, and ask them more consistently the difficult questions they are asked so infrequently.

7. AJE prides itself on bringing hard-hitting, objective news coverage of the global South (Africa, Asia, Middle East, Latin America, etc.) to the West. It aims to bring as many sides to the story as it possibly can; bringing the news consumer all perspectives in what are often not straightforward situations. The network broadcasts news features and analysis, documentaries, live debates, current affairs, business, and sports. Canadians would no doubt benefit from a broadcaster whose more than 1,200 journalists representing over 50 ethnicities bring news coverage from around Canada and throughout the world.

8. CJPME supports the fair and objective way in which the CRTC, through its Regulatory policy, Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2008-100, 30 October 2008, allows for the mix of Canadian and non-Canadian broadcasting content. In particular, as it relates to non-Canadian news services, we are confident that AJE meets the spirit and the substance of the following excerpt from the Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2008-100:

“In regard to non-Canadian news services... ..the Commission considers a more open-entry approach to be consistent with the importance it places on a diversity of editorial points of view. Accordingly, the Commission stated in paragraph 246 of Broadcasting Public Notice 2008-100 that,

absent clear evidence, as determined by the Commission, that a non-Canadian news service would violate Canadian regulations, such as those regarding abusive comment, the Commission will be predisposed to authorize non-Canadian news services for distribution in Canada.”

9. While Al-Jazeera has been subjected to negative stereotyping since 9/11, CJPME believes that, from its inception in 1996, Al-Jazeera has given the region’s citizens real, unbiased news. It is the first Arab broadcaster to cover news in Israel, and to introduce Israelis to Arab viewers in their true light, unlike the state-run propaganda they had been used to. It has interviewed Israeli politicians, academics and human rights activists, and it has delivered news to its viewers that is complete, critical and at times, devastatingly difficult for some to see.

10. AJE has adopted a strong Code of Ethics which includes adhering to journalistic values, giving no priority to commercial or political over professional consideration; endeavouring to get to the truth and declaring it in a manner which leaves no doubt about its validity and accuracy; treating audiences with due respect; presenting the diverse points of view and opinions without bias and partiality; recognizing diversity in human societies so as to present unbiased and faithful reflection of them; acknowledging a mistake when it occurs, promptly correcting it and ensuring it does not recur; and distinguishing between news material, opinion and analysis to avoid the snares of speculation and propaganda.

11. We also note that AJE adheres to the journalistic standards wherever it is located throughout the world. In London, for example, it is regulated by the well-regarded Ofcom, regulator of UK media. In the two years since it began broadcasting in England, AJE has not experienced one complaint, or breach of any regulations or codes.

12. During the Israeli-Gaza war, Al-Jazeera was the only network with correspondents in Gaza, covering a story no one else was able to access and delivering a complete story from both sides of the conflict. Writing for Israel’s daily Haaretz, Gideon Levy penned, “Al Jazeera English is not what you might think. It offers balanced, professional reporting from correspondents both in Sderot and Gaza.”
(<http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasen/spages/1054282.html>).

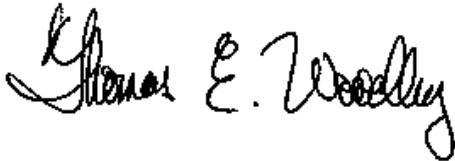
13. CJPME believes that AJE's Code of Ethics, adherence to journalistic standards and proven track record all provide strong protections against the possibility of violating Canadian regulations, such as those regarding abusive comment, as set out in Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2008-100.

14. Canadians can be proud that a native son, Tony Burman, heads this award-winning news broadcaster. Former editor-in-chief of CBC news, and winner of many awards himself, Mr. Burman brings journalistic integrity to everything he does.

15. Finally, we note with favour that AJE intends to open a Canadian news Bureau, as it has in 69 other countries across the globe. This differentiates AJE from many other broadcasters who have received a licence to broadcast in Canada. This would bring Canadian stories to the world, something other Canadian broadcasters are not as equipped to do. It would also make AJE the only international broadcaster located in Canada. It would employ Canadians, bringing national and international news to Canadians.

16. In conclusion, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East believes that approval of AJE's application will enhance an already great democracy, by way of offering alternative perspectives on familiar and not-so-familiar news stories. We can be confident that Canadians will appreciate and benefit from what AJE will bring in the way of a diversity of points of view.

Sincerely,



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