



# Commonwealth Broadcasting Association

Working for quality broadcasting

Mark Bunting,  
Ofcom

1<sup>st</sup> May 2007

RE: Ofcom invitation to submit views re the role of Channel 4 Television in the future of UK Public Service Broadcasting

Dear Mr. Bunting,

I am aware that my colleague Elizabeth Smith, Secretary General of the CBA has already responded to you regarding this issue. However, as Project Director of the **CBA-DFID Broadcast Media Scheme** I wanted to make a further submission with specific reference to Channel 4's PSB remit and the Channel's significance in relation to international coverage in the UK.

Despite increasing globalization and global interconnections, international - especially developing world- coverage on mainstream television in the UK has been in general decline. ['Viewing the World' DFID 2000, 3WE Annual Reports]. The CBA receives funding from DFID for the Broadcast Media Scheme which aims to redress the decline in international reporting by facilitating improved coverage of the wider world on UK television.

Research [DFID Viewing the World 2000, Reflecting the Real World 2006 IBT/CBA/DFID VSO] also continues to indicate that television remains the primary source of information about the developing world for the UK public. Such information enables the public to 'make sense of' the wider world as global and UK citizens.

Since its launch Channel 4 has been one of the main providers of international coverage to a mainstream television audience in the UK. Its 7pm news programme and strands such as Dispatches are exceptional in terms of reporting stories in and about the developing world. As such it is important for UK citizens that C4 remains able to continue to deliver on and improve this aspect of its PSB remit.

Ofcom's foresight in commissioning an early financial review of Channel 4 is commendable. Having read the LEK report and associated analyses by Channel 4 and Ofcom, the potential scale and timing of the funding challenges facing Channel 4 are quite clear. It is agreed by all parties that Channel 4's commercial performance will deteriorate in the near to medium future with an underlying impact on C4's continuing ability to deliver its full PSB remit.

The current model of PSB plurality in the UK has undoubtedly helped maintain existing levels of international coverage in the UK - as compared to the US where international coverage is weak and audiences are offered a primarily domestic rather than world view. Of considerable concern is the decline, highlighted in the analyses, in both the production of original programme content by Channel 4 and their output of serious factual programming in general. This was highlighted in IBT's analysis of 2006 where despite a slight increase in some international coverage due to political and media focus on Africa in 2005, Channel 4 had performed 'less well' in this genre. It is of interest that 'acquired' programmes are generally from the U.S.

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In order to enable Channel 4 to continue, and preferably increase, delivery of high quality international coverage, Ofcom should implement short-term measures that would support Channel 4 in the immediate and mid- term while acting promptly to seek solutions to Channel 4's predicament in the longer term, especially as such solutions may well take some time to be determined and implemented.

Yours sincerely,

Sally-Ann Wilson. Project Director. CBA.