



Executive Council
of Australian Jewry Inc.

MEDIA STATEMENT

28 MAY 2018

Interview of Rev Dr Stephen Sizer on RN Breakfast on Good Friday, 30 March 2018

The ABC has written to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) apologising for inaccuracies and for the omission of material context that occurred during an interview of Rev Dr Stephen Sizer which was aired on RN Breakfast on Good Friday, and the eve of the Jewish festival of Pesach (Passover), on 30 March 2018.

In a letter to ABC Managing Director, Michelle Guthrie, on 5 April 2018, the ECAJ complained that the interviewer, David Rutledge, had underplayed the gravity of accusations of antisemitism that had been made against Sizer and “projected a generally supportive attitude towards Sizer from the outset, which resulted in a soft interview that allowed Sizer’s self-serving, inaccurate answers to pass unchallenged.”

The ECAJ complaint alleged that “David Rutledge allowed Sizer to get away with claiming that none of the speakers at one of the conferences he addressed in Tehran in 2014 were criticised as antisemitic. In fact, as was reported at the time, the Iranian government-run Press TV described the conference as intending to “unveil the secrets behind the dominance of the Zionist lobby over the US and EU politics”, with one session devoted to examining “Mossad’s role in the 9/11 Coup d’Etat”, and another discussing “9/11 and the Holocaust as pro-Zionist ‘Public myths’ ”. In questioning Sizer, David Rutledge gave only partial information about, and under-played the full extent of, Sizer’s own statements legitimising outlandish conspiracy theories that blame Israel for the September 11 terror attacks in the US. The audience was not informed that the link which Sizer posted on his Facebook page in 2015 was to an article entitled “9/11 Israel did it”, and that Sizer had subsequently [publicly apologised](#) for posting it. There was no mention of the fact that Sizer’s Church in the UK had been so embarrassed by his public statements that it had extracted an undertaking from him to stop commenting on the subject while he remained a vicar, [an undertaking which Sizer broke](#).”

In response, the ABC wrote, “The interview included information to indicate that Dr Sizer holds controversial views; is a critic of Israel; at times has been accused of anti-Semitism and that his activities could be used by explicitly anti-Semitic groups. However, Dr Sizer’s mischaracterisation of the Tehran conference which was not challenged or corrected in the interview, together with the lack of information on his repeated censure by his Church was not in keeping with the ABC’s editorial standard for accuracy: the interview did not present these issues with the necessary *material* context.”

“The program has appended an Editor’s Note to the website and provided relevant links to further information (<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/good-friday-8:05/9601212>). The ABC apologises for this lapse and would like to assure you that this finding has been discussed with the program area and RN management, and a summary will be published on the ABC website”

The following note has now been included on the page of the ABC website that relates to the program that was aired on ABC RN on 30 March 2018:

“NOTE:

Presenter David Rutledge acknowledged to the audience that Dr Sizer’s views are controversial, that he has been accused of anti-Semitism and that he attended a conference in Tehran in 2014, which has been criticized for including speakers with anti-Semitic affiliations. However, the ABC accepts that the interview did not provide sufficient context for listeners to adequately understand the extent of the controversies. The ABC acknowledges that the Tehran conference did include anti-Semitic elements, and information on the Anglican Church’s censure of Dr Sizer can be found [here](#).”

Commenting on the ABC response, ECAJ co-CEO Peter Wertheim welcomed the ABC’s acknowledgement of inaccuracies and omission of material context, and its apology, but added, “Sadly, this will come too late to undo the false, indeed poisonous, impressions given to many ABC listeners to the program who heard the interview but will not be aware of the ABC’s admission of error and apology”.

“The ABC has also failed to appreciate the gravity of the wrong done when David Rutledge took it upon himself to tell Sizer, and the audience, “I accept you are not an antisemite”, instead of allowing the audience to draw its own conclusions. The ABC has pointed to David Rutledge’s academic qualifications and said that the ABC’s editorial standards permitted him to provide his own analysis. However, David Rutledge provided no analysis at all, only his own unsupported assertion. There is a big difference.”

Wertheim also criticised the ABC’s failure to address specifically the ECAJ’s complaint that “the ABC audience is surely entitled to know what Christian Zionism is from the point of view of a knowledgeable and articulate exponent, not merely from the point of view of a harsh and discredited critic”.

“We are now considering pursuing these unresolved aspects of our complaint with the Australian Communications and Media Authority”, he concluded.

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