BATTLING MEDIA FALSEHOOD (1)

Posted on June 2, 2015 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

21 May 2015

The battle against Turkish denialism is fought on many fronts. One important arena is the media. The day Armenians and nationals of numerous countries commemorated the centennial of the Armenian Genocide, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) sent a guideline to its on-air staff advising them qualify the phrase "Armenian Genocide" and air the Turkish side of the topic. The Armenian Canadian Conservative Association wrote to the CBC on April 28, 2015 and demanded a correction (see " May 10, 2015"). Further three letters were emailed between the corporation and the ACCA. Below is the correspondence.

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CBC's guideline (April 24, 2015)
CBC Not Totally Sold on Armenian Genocide

Today marks the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide.

Or, as CBC News must phrase it, it's the 100th anniversary of "what is widely referred to as the Armenian genocide. The Republic of Turkey disputes the term."

Here's a memo that went out to CBC newsrooms this morning from the CBC Alert Desk:

****IMPORTANT: Those doing coverage of today's Armenian commemorations should read the below note on CBC policy regarding the use of the term "genocide." We CAN use it, but it should be qualified.*

From the CBC Language Guide (asterisks and bolding added by Alert Desk)

The word genocide, coined in the 20th century, refers to the intentional and widespread extermination of a particular group. The term "ethnic cleansing" is sometimes used, since the victims are often targeted because of their racial or national background.

The 1948 United Nations Convention on Genocide broadens the meaning to include acts intended "to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group."

In news stories, use the word genocide with care. If facts are in dispute, mention this and attribute claims, conclusions, etc., accordingly.

For instance, historians consider the Holocaust an attempted genocide of the Jewish people. Despite the strong views of a few fringe communities, the Holocaust can be considered an attempted genocide without qualification. Nazis murdered six million Jews during the Second World War.

By contrast, Turkey has refused to classify the mass killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turks during the First World War as genocide. Turkish authorities consider the deaths a legitimate military response to revolution and banditry. Canada and more than 20 other countries have formally recognized the killings as genocide, including Belgium, France, Italy and Russia. So has a United Nations commission and the European Parliament. Critics, however, have questioned whether the killings between 1915 and 1916 were actually part of an orchestrated, systematic attempt at extermination - a key component in their definition of genocide. Many Armenians were killed. Others died of starvation or disease.

For this reason, the common term Armenian genocide should be qualified when used in our reporting. Examples:

*** *In what's widely referred to as the Armenian genocide ...*

*** *... The UN, Canada and more than 20 other countries recognize the slaughter as genocide. But Turkey disputes the term ...*

Proper nouns are OK but still require context:

Millions of people around the world mark April 24 as the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. More than 20 countries, including Canada, recognize the slaughter of Armenians during the First World War as genocide. But Turkey rejects the term.

There's no need to use a word such as "alleged" to describe mass killings that are known to have taken place. But when facts are in dispute our audience should be informed. (Armenians say 1.5 million died, for instance, while the Republic of Turkey puts the number at 300,000.) While some governments and many scholars label the killings genocide, it's important to acknowledge that Turkey and others do not. By mentioning both official positions, CBC News maintains balanced coverage.

UPDATE:

CANADALAND has also obtained the Montreal Gazette's policy for referring to the Armenian

genocide, which is consistent with the policies of the Boston Globe and the New York Times. This is taken from the text of the statement, which is signed by The Gazette's Editor-in-Chief:

"It seems clear from the historical record that what took place in Turkey around 1915 amounted to a genocide, as defined in the 1948 UN convention on genocide: killing or harming people 'with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.' As a result, reporters and editors are free to use the word genocide, without quotation marks, in relation to the Armenian tragedy and should avoid using qualifiers such as 'alleged,' 'disputed' or' what Armenians call.'

We may report Turkish denials of such a claim when they are relevant, but we should not feel obliged to include such denials with every reference to the Armenian genocide."

The ACCA demand for correction (April 28, 2015)

April 28, 2015

Ms. Esther Enkin
CBC, Ombudsman
P.O. Box 500 Station A
Toronto, Ontario
M5W 1E6

Dear Madam,

The CBC Alert Desk issued an internal memo to staff covering the Armenian Genocide centennial commemorations and instructed them that "the common term Armenian genocide should be qualified when used in our reporting." Details of the unfortunate memo were first posted on the Canadaland media watch website.

To justify its policy instructions, the CBC memo went on to state: "Turkey has refused to classify the mass killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turks during the First World War as genocide. Turkish authorities consider the deaths a legitimate military response to revolution and banditry."

The memo also stated "critics, however, have questioned whether the killings between 1915 and 1916 were actually part of an orchestrated, systematic attempt at extermination--a key component in their definition of genocide." The guidelines concluded that "while some governments and many scholars label the killings genocide, it's important to acknowledge that Turkey and others do not."

The CBC memo reads like a page from the Turkish government denial book. It's shocking to watch our publicly-funded corporation become an instrument of historical revisionism. The memo undermines CBC's credibility and integrity. Thus in contrast to the 'Globe and Mail', 'Toronto Star', 'Montreal Gazette', 'Ottawa Citizen', the Sun newspaper chain, CTV and other media outlets, the CBC is the only major Canadian media outlet which has adopted such a regressive policy. The 'Montreal Gazette' policy states: "It seems clear from the historical record that what took place in Turkey

around 1915 amounted to a genocide, as defined in the 1948 UN convention on genocide…As a result, reporters and editors are free to use the word genocide, without quotation marks, in relation to the Armenian tragedy and should avoid using qualifiers." Other major Canadian media outlets have similar guidelines in their style books.

Major international media outlets such as the 'New York Times', 'Boston Globe', 'Los Angeles Times', 'Guardian', 'Independent', 'Daily Telegraph', 'Times' of London and all French media institutions in Quebec and France unequivocally utilize the term 'genocide' to describe what happened to the Armenians in 1915.

In addition to Canada, France, Russia, the Vatican and a score of other countries, the horrific crime of the Armenian Genocide are recognized by Germany and Austria (Turkey's allies in the First World War), Quebec, Ontario, B.C., and 43 American states.

In the face of the mountain of evidence proving the reality of the Armenian Genocide it's stunning to witness the CBC's belated guideline which fabricates a false equivalency between the 'studies' of a half-dozen Turkey-hired 'scholars and critics' and the overwhelming majority of genocide and Holocaust scholars, experts, and organizations. The ultimate authority on genocides is the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS). In a letter to then-Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the IAGS labelled such 'historians' as "Scholars who advise your government and who are affiliated in other ways with your state-controlled institutions are not impartial. Such so-called scholars work to serve the agenda of historical and moral obfuscation." In contrast to the above denialist and revisionist "critics", over 400 historians and genocide experts, among them 126 Holocaust scholars (Elie Wiesel, Yehuda Bauer, Israel Charny, Steven Katz, Steven Jacobs, and Irving L. Horowitz…etc.), have asserted that what Ottoman Turkey committed was genocide.

The CBC memo claims that its news department "maintains balanced coverage." However, its guidelines re the Armenian Genocide makes us wonder about the corporation's credibility, integrity and professionalism. Do Armenians and credible scholars have to prove again and again and again that Ottoman Turkey committed genocide? The gross inaccuracies of the CBC Armenian Genocide narrative is a black mark on the corporation and should be erased immediately by unequivocally asserting the veracity of the Armenian Genocide.

It seems that the persons responsible for this appalling guideline are unaware that nowadays within Turkey an influential movement of righteous Turks have acknowledged what happened to the Armenians as genocide and are openly criticizing their government's denialist policy. It is shameful for the CBC to succumb to the Turkish government falsehoods when courageous Turks are standing up to the same government's intimidation and are putting their safety on line by demanding Armenian Genocide recognition and atonement.

Considering CBC's misguided guideline, we wonder whether those responsible for writing the embarrassing advice are more qualified than jurist Raphael Lemkin, the father of the UN Genocide

Convention, who during a 1949 interview with CBS said: "I became interested in genocide because it happened to the Armenians." In his autobiography he also stated " … Soon contemporary examples of genocide followed, such as the slaughter of the Armenians in 1915." Elsewhere in his book Lemkin said: "…A bold plan was formulated in my mind. This consisted obtaining the ratification by Turkey …This would be an atonement for genocide of the Armenians."

Furthermore, the IAGS, during its 1997 convention, unanimously adopted a resolution reaffirming: "The mass murder of over a million Armenians in Turkey in 1915 is a case of genocide which conforms to the statutes of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide."

Finally, the memo is in direct conflict with former CBC Ombudsman Vince Carlin's March 12, 2008 report. In his report, Mr. Carlin said: "In the cases at issue , the preponderance of credible academic work has found that the Turkish government took deliberate action against the Armenian population and those actions fit what became the definition of genocide. …While fairness and balance would impel journalists to be on the look-out for credible contradictory evidence, appropriate weight must be given to broad-based conclusions, in this case not only academic-based, but also endorsed by UN agencies and the Canadian government."

He went on to say: "I must point out that, as stated above, policy does not imply that equal time has to be given to those who dissent from a historical consensus. The implications of such a notion are evident when one thinks of giving substantial time to those who deny that there was a genocide directed against Jews during World War II."

The current memo, being inconsistent with Mr. Carlin's report, creates confusion for your staff and audience.

With the above in mind, we kindly ask you to retract the said policy memo, apologize to the Armenian, Jewish, Greek Pontian, Assyrian and other victims of genocide, and issue a new directive to uphold the historical truth without qualifiers and lame euphemisms.

We also request a meeting with the CBC CEO, the head of the news department, and the Ombudsman to formulate a historically accurate portrayal of the Armenian Genocide.

Sincerely,

Vic Demirdjian, President

The CBC reply to ACCA

-------- Original Message --------
Subject: Mrs. Hajinian: Your concerns about CBC News coverage of the

Armenian Genocide
Date: Tue, May 05, 2015 5:22 am

Sevan Hajinian
Toronto, ON

Dear Mrs. Hajinian,

Thank you for your April 30th and May 1st emails to CBC President Hubert Lacroix, CBC Ombudsman Esther Enkin and CBC News General Manager and Editor in Chief Jennifer McGuire expressing concern about what you called the "misguided policy memo" at CBC News relating to our coverage of the Armenian Genocide. Jennifer McGuire has asked me to reply on her behalf.

Before I respond, I want to thank you for the documentation you shared to provide more depth to the argument about evidence and the Genocide, and in particular a copy of your book "The Armenian Genocide Denied: A Response to Turkey's Thirteen Propaganda Sins."

I need to clarify a couple of things about our coverage of the 100th anniversary on April 24:

(1) The so-called "policy memo" was less than it may have seemed. Like most news organizations, we have created an internal language guide to help our journalists speak consistently. This was part of a long-standing entry around use of the word "genocide"…… But even at that, it is not a directive to our journalists about what editorial stand to take on this important story.

(2) We are best judged not on an internal memo, but on the actual content of our reporting. To be clear, programmers are free to refer to the Armenian Genocide without inserting any qualifiers. As a "for instance", this is how we led our coverage of the Anniversary on our flagship radio news program "The World at Six" on Friday:

The small nation of Armenia came to a standstill today, to mark the day one hundred years ago that a genocide began against its people.

As many as 1 and a half million dead were remembered in a sombre ceremony at the country's massive memorial.

In other commemorations -- and demonstrations -- around the world, Turkey was condemned for refusing to acknowledge the killings were an organized campaign of genocide.

In Ottawa, Turks and Armenians converged on Parliament Hill for a tense stand-off and march.

The CBC's Evan Dyer joins us from Ottawa….

There will, of course, be occasions where we need to refer to Turkey's public stance. That is our obligation as journalists. But there is no attempt to inject false balance. We report on this story - as with all stories - in a manner which is respectful, fair and above all truthful.

I hope this response has reassured you of the integrity of our news service. I understand the genuine concern on this matter. And I thank you for caring enough to hold us to account.

Sincerely,

Jack Nagler,
Director, Journalistic Public Accountability and Engagement
CBC News

The ACCA reply to the CBC (May 10, 2015)

May 10, 2015

Ms. Esther Enkin
CBC, Ombudsman
P.O. Box 500 Station A
Toronto, Ontario
M5W 1E6

Dear Madam,

On 24. April 2105 CBC's Alert Desk issued an internal memo to staff covering the Armenian Genocide centennial commemorations and instructed them that "the common term Armenian genocide should be qualified when used in our reporting."

The Armenian Canadian Conservative Association (ACCA) wrote a letter (see attached) to you and other CBC officials, condemning the memo and asking that the CBC "retract the said policy... and issue a new directive to uphold the historical truth without qualifiers and lame euphemisms."

Furthermore, the ACCA brought to the attention of the CBC Ombudsman that the misguided memo is in conflict with former CBC Ombudsman Vince Carlin's March 12, 2008 report. In his report, Mr. Carlin said: "In the cases at issue , the preponderance of credible academic work has found that the Turkish government took deliberate action against the Armenian population and those actions fit what became the definition of genocide."

Mr. Carlin went on to say: "I must point out that, as stated above, policy does not imply that equal time has to be given to those who dissent from a historical consensus." The current memo, being inconsistent with Mr. Carlin's report, creates confusion among CBC staffers and audience.

The ACCA also asked to meet with you and your colleagues to "formulate a historically accurate portrayal of the Armenian Genocide." On May 5, Jack Nagler, director, Journalistic Public Accountability and Engagement, CBC News, wrote to us (see attached) defending the memo on the basis that "The so-called 'policy memo' was less than it may have seemed." Mr. Nagler added "it is

not a directive to our journalists about what editorial stand to take on this important story… To be clear, programmers are free to refer to the Armenian Genocide without inserting any qualifiers."

Mr. Nagler's words are perplexing. We are at a loss as to what Mr. Nagler means by "The so-called 'policy memo' is less than it may have seemed"? The original memo plainly told staff what to say on air. While the CBC sent the shocking memo, in his letter Mr. Nagler surprisingly takes credit that some CBC hosts/reporters called the event "Armenian Genocide". Mr. Nagler's attitude is bizarre and cavalier. In effect, he is boasting that some staff ignored the memo. Staff who ignored the wrong-headed directive demonstrated integrity and courage. We praise them for upholding the truth.

The CBC owes it staff, audience and the Canadian public a proper guideline correcting the chaos regarding the corporation's stand regarding the veracity of the Armenian Genocide. The guideline should revert to Mr. Carlin's view and not indulge in false equivalency in its coverage of the greatest tragedy that the Armenian nation has suffered in its 4,000-year recorded history. The notion of "balance" around the Armenian Genocide is quite offensive.

Would the CBC give the other side of the Holocaust narrative and quote the neo-Nazis, the Aryan Brotherhood and other fringe hate groups?

…….

Please consider that your inexplicable original directive has already caused immense damage to the truth since it was issued the week when the Armenian Genocide was in the news more than any other time in recent history.

The ACCA members look forward to seeing you address this important issue in a righteous fashion.

Sincerely,

Vatche Demirdjian
Chairman

The CBC reply to the ACCA (May 12, 2014)

Date: Tue, 12 May 2015 12:17:45 -0400
Subject: ACCA Calls CBC Reply 'Underwhelming'
From:
To:
CC:

Dear Sevan Hajinian and Vatche Demirdjian:

This will acknowledge your emails of May 12, 2015. The mandate of the Office of the Ombudsman is

to ensure that news and current affairs items published on CBC platforms conform to CBC's Journalistic Standards and Practices.

I note your complaint is about a leaked entry from the CBC language guide, an entry CBC management has told you is under review. It was sent as an internal document. The Office of the Ombudsman is independent of the news department, and has no say over its daily workings, nor do I set policy. I can make recommendations and regularly consult with news management. At this point what you are asking me to review is beyond my mandate.

Sincerely,

Esther Enkin
CBC Ombudsman

The ACCA reply to the CBC (May 14, 2015)

Ms. Esther Enkin
CBC, Ombudsman
P.O. Box 500 Station A
Toronto, Ontario
M5W 1E6

Dear Ms. Enkin,

We appreciate your prompt May 12 reply to our concerns regarding the CBC coverage of the Armenian Genocide centennial commemorations.

Our concern is about the inconsistent coverage of the Armenian Genocide centenary on various programs and newscasts. It was not about the Alert Desk language guideline memo.

Some of the radio and TV news coverage was disturbing, especially on April 24--the day of the commemorations. Many of our community members were troubled with the euphemisms and qualifiers which the CBC hosts and news readers used.

My grandfather was one of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide. To hear genocide euphemisms and qualifiers on the day Armenians and people around the globe commemorated the centennial was highly painful. To see one's personal and national anguish questioned in such a cavalier manner is insulting.

We are cognizant that a number of CBC hosts/moderators did not question the historical truth of the Armenian Genocide. We are grateful to them for their principled stand and journalistic integrity. On the other hand, others toed the line and observed the unhelpful guideline. Thus, what was aired that day was inconsistent and did not conform to CBC's Journalistic Standards and Practices.

Furthermore, we found Jack Nagler's May 5 reply to our first letter perplexing. In his letter, he stated:

"The so-called 'policy memo' was less than it may have seemed." He went on to say: " .... But even at that, it is not a directive to our journalists about what editorial stand to take on this important story." .... It's what follows that's disturbing. "But even at that, it is not a directive to our journalists about what editorial stand to take on this important story," Mr. Nagler stated. In so doing, he clouded the issue. Thus, the need for clarification.

As Ombudsman, you have the mandate to set the record straight and leave no room for ambiguity and misinterpretation.

We believe your predecessor Vince Carlin's 2008 examination of the same issue and the subsequent report sets a prudent guideline for CBC employees.

We appreciate your kind attention and cooperation in addressing this issue.

Sincerely,

Sevan Hajinian (Mrs.), Vice-Chair