



IRISH TRAVELLER MOVEMENT

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Submission by the Irish Traveller Movement to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland Public Consultation on a Draft Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs in the Broadcast Media

Deadline 5pm, 14 March 2012

I. INTRODUCTION

The Irish Traveller Movement is a non-governmental organisation established in 1990 led by a partnership of Travellers and settled people providing a platform to seek full equality for Travellers in Irish society and recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority.

II. OVERVIEW

The Irish Traveller Movement welcomes the Draft Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs in the Broadcast Media (hereinafter “the Code”) and the opportunity to make submissions in relation to same. In particular we welcome the reference to the principle of fairness and to the avoidance of unfair, partial treatment of groups at number 20. This submission intends to draw inspiration from international human rights law that references mass media and the treatment of ethnic groups to make practical suggestions for improvements and additions to the Code.

III. HUMAN RIGHTS DUE DILIGENCE

The Irish Traveller Movement has carried out what may be referred to as “human rights due diligence” on the proposed Code and has identified two provisions of international human rights law that will inform this submission.

United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

Article 7 of the Convention states as follows:

“State parties undertake to adopt immediate and effective measures, particularly in the fields of teaching, education, culture and information, with a view to combating prejudices which lead to racial discrimination and to promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and racial or ethnical groups, as well as to propagating

the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and this Convention.”

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 17 of the Convention states as follows:

“State parties recognise the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health. To this end, state parties shall: (a) Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of Article 29 [Education]...(d) Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous”

IV. COMMENTS ON THE PRINCIPLES

Section 3 - Principles Underpinning the Rules - Page 9 - Fairness

The consultation questions posed refer to the appropriateness of the principles and whether any other principles should be added.

The Irish Traveller Movement respectfully suggest that the explanation of the word “Fairness” include a reference to respect for diversity and avoidance of bias and stereotyping. This would bring it into line with the definition of “fairness” taken from the “Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct” of the Radio Television Digital News Association of the United States.¹

Section 3 - Principles Underpinning the Rules - Page 9 – Objectivity & Impartiality

We also suggest that consideration be given to the inclusion of a more explicit reference to the proportionate balance of Traveller related topics. Broadly, there can be a reliance on a debating format both in news, current affairs and entertainment programmes where Travellers are often defending their community/ culture in panel discussions or from audience views. Additionally, Travellers by and large are subject to interviews about ‘being a Traveller’ and so on balance Traveller views on a wider range of subjects as expressed through the media, are not proportionate.

Given Travellers are statistically underrepresented across media programmes either as contributors or deliverers of media, can in itself, perpetuate a negative stereotype.

V. COMMENTS ON THE RULES

Section 4 - Rules - Page 16 - Objectivity and Impartiality Rules

¹ www.rtnda.org

The consultation questions relate to scope and wording and whether any additional provisions should be added.

Number 20-“News and current affairs coverage should not result in the unfair, inaccurate or partial treatment of individuals or groups in society”.

The Irish Traveller Movement remains concerned about the sometimes unfair and partial treatment of members of the Traveller community in the broadcast media and where there is a lack of balance in broadcast material involving Travellers. The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland are no doubt aware of the hugely significant role played by the media in propagating stereotypes and bias. We respectfully submit that this one rule does not go far enough to address what is for many their only and negative source of information about this minority community. We offer the following by way of example:

- The broadcasting of Knuckle at a time largely allocated to a Sunday night movie slot and where there was high profile advertising leading up to it – when it was an “art house” type low budget documentary.
- The speculation (wrongly) of Paul Reynolds RTE’s crime correspondent on Morning Ireland on the link between Melanie McCarthy’s murder and a Traveller feud – it subsequently turned out to be gangland / drug related but not Traveller related.
- The reporting of the deceased, Melanie McCarthy, as a “settled” Traveller; a misleading term that is unacceptable to the Traveller community.

In this regard we draw your attention to a specific General Comment by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in this regard.

General Comment XXVII (Fifty-Seventh Session, 2000) Discrimination Against Roma², A/55/18 (2000) 154

“Measures in the field of media

36. To act as appropriate for the elimination of any ideas of racial or ethnic superiority, of racial hatred and incitement to discrimination and violence against Roma in the media, in accordance with the Convention

37. To encourage awareness among professionals of all media of the particular responsibility to not disseminate prejudices and to avoid reporting incidents involving individual members of Roma communities in a way which blames such communities as a whole.

38. To develop educational and media campaigns to educate the public about Roma life, society and culture and the importance of building an inclusive society while respecting

² The definition of Roma in international human rights law includes members of the Traveller Community of Ireland. See Ireland’s National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_Ireland_strategy_en.pdf

the human rights and the identity of the Roma

39. To encourage and facilitate access by the Roma to the media, including newspapers and television and radio programmes, the establishment of their own media, as well as the training of Roma journalists

40. To encourage methods of self-monitoring by the media, through a code of conduct for media organisations, in order to avoid racial, discriminatory or biased language.”

We suggest the adoption of paragraphs 37-40 of the above into the Code.

In respect of paragraph 37 of the above, this gives much more clarity to the broadcaster than the current number 20 of the Code.

In respect of paragraph 38 above, current programming such as “My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding” merely exoticises the Traveller community in a way that attracts negative commentary and that many Travellers have reported feeling no connection to. The emphasis needs to be on the importance of inclusion with respect for culture.

Initiatives such as TUS and the Work Placement Programme introduced by the government offer a clear opportunity to broadcasters to train Traveller journalists and this should be encouraged in the Code, as seen in paragraph 39 above.

In respect of paragraph 40, the use of language regarding Travellers should be codified to include clear guidelines around when it is appropriate to reference a suspect’s ethnicity and to address gross generalisations in respect of the Traveller community.

Concluding

By reference to ethics, fairness and objectivity Travellers statically experience unequal participation within the domain of media instead experience extraordinary imbalance both in the way issues which relate to their community are reported and how little value is placed on their views on wider Irish society. While no concrete measures have been implemented to remedy or give affirmative actions to increase Travellers input into the media infrastructure in explicit recognition of their individual protection within the Equal Status Legislation; the opposite is often true exemplified by bad practice in relation to fundamental principles governing the way in which some broadcast media engage with Travellers, on issues decided by that media - as newsworthy Traveller related broadcast items.

For example: An ongoing concern in this regard relates to how Travellers are selected for interviews across news, current affairs and entertainment programmes and where producers and researchers request a “so called ordinary or real Traveller” instead of a representative voice. Often explicitly stating the desire not to have “the usual faces “or those who are working with Traveller organisations. It could be perceived therefore that this avoids the developed analysis of the historical oppression of Travellers, so vital to contextualising issues such as violence, crime, unemployment, educational and long

term and well documented disadvantage.

Suggested action: The specific naming of Travellers for special affirmative actions to include sensitive measures within the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland's Code of Fairness would be extremely welcomed and contribute to addressing a long term imbalance of reporting.

The Irish Traveller Movement would be willing to elaborate on any of the points made here either by way of written communication or by personal attendance at a meeting with the BAI or one of its committees.

ENDS