



Tim Davie
Director General, BBC
BBC Broadcasting House
Portland Place
London W1A 1AA
United Kingdom

28 February 2025

Dear Mr Davie

**Formal Complaint Regarding the Removal of *Gaza: How to Survive a Warzone*
Alleged Breach of Impartiality, Editorial Standards, and Public Service Obligations**

I am writing to lodge a formal complaint regarding the BBC's removal of *Gaza: How to Survive a Warzone* from its iPlayer platform.

This decision raises serious concerns about potential breaches of the BBC's legal, regulatory, and ethical obligations under its Royal Charter, Editorial Guidelines, and Ofcom's Broadcasting Code. Given the impact of this decision on public trust and media integrity, I request a detailed justification, a timeline for the final review process, and a clear commitment to consistent editorial standards.

Factual Background & BBC's Stated Justification

The documentary aired on BBC Two on 17 February 2025, providing a first-hand account of the lived experiences of Palestinian children in Gaza during Israel's ongoing military operations. The BBC removed the documentary from iPlayer on February 21, 2025, citing concerns over the undisclosed familial connection between the 13-year-old narrator, Abdullah Al-Yazouri, and his father, Ayman Al-Yazouri, a Deputy Minister of Agriculture in the Hamas-run administration—a civil service role concerned with food production.

On 27 February 2025, the BBC issued a statement that it had conducted an "initial review" and will undertake "a full fact-finding review". The statement did not provide additional justification for the removal of the documentary from BBC platforms beyond the young narrator's familial connection. No timeline has been provided for the completion of the full review. Nor has the BBC provided any details of what this complete review will entail. The BBC spokesperson further stated that there are no plans to broadcast the programme again in its current form or return it to iPlayer, pending further assessment. The BBC has not provided any public evidence that the documentary contains factual inaccuracies or breaches BBC Editorial Guidelines.

This raises significant concerns that the removal was a reactive decision influenced by external political pressure, rather than an editorially justified action based on objective standards.

Breach of BBC Obligations

1. Failure to Uphold Impartiality (BBC Editorial Guidelines Section 4: Impartiality & Royal Charter)

The BBC's Editorial Guidelines require due impartiality, stating that:

"A wide range of significant views and perspectives must be given due weight and prominence."

The removal of *Gaza: How to Survive a Warzone*, without evidence of factual inaccuracy, suggests a failure to uphold this requirement and creates a dangerous precedent where Palestinian voices are disproportionately silenced.

Additionally, the standard applied to this documentary must now be applied consistently across all BBC content. This leads to key questions:

- Will the BBC now apply the same level of scrutiny to documentaries and other content produced with the cooperation of the Israeli government or military?
- Will the BBC's recent documentary ***Surviving October 7th: We Will Dance Again***, which was no doubt made with IDF and Israeli government cooperation, also be pulled for failing to disclose the political affiliations and potential war crime accusations of its Israeli contributors?

If the BBC does not apply equal editorial scrutiny to Israeli narratives, it will reinforce the perception of systemic bias in its coverage of Israel-Palestine.

2. Breach of Fairness to Contributors (BBC Editorial Guidelines Section 6 & Ofcom Broadcasting Code)

BBC Guidelines and Ofcom's Broadcasting Code require that contributors be treated fairly. However, in this case:

- The narrator is a 13-year-old child, yet the BBC has retroactively applied a political litmus test to his eligibility to tell his story.
- The BBC does not apply this same level of scrutiny to Israeli contributors, including IDF officials and government ministers who are given BBC platforms despite their direct roles in military operations that may constitute war crimes.

This constitutes a discriminatory standard that undermines the BBC's duty to treat all contributors equitably under Sections 6.3.38 to 6.3.40.

This selective enforcement of editorial scrutiny constitutes a clear breach of fairness standards and raises questions about discriminatory treatment of Palestinian voices.

We provide the following for your consideration and if necessary are able to provide you with significant primary eyewitness testimony supporting the allegation that the Israeli government and the IDF have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity:

- **The ICJ Advisory Opinion of 24 July 2024** unequivocally concluded that Israel's prolonged occupation of Palestinian territories constitutes an unlawful occupation under international law, emphasizing its annexationist character and its violation of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination as well as acts of apartheid that Israel had committed in relation to the occupation.
- **On 26 January 2024, the ICJ issued provisional measures** addressing the prevention of genocide following an application from South Africa based on the Genocide Convention. The ICJ found that the risk of Genocide was credible and ordered Israel to take immediate action to protect Palestinian communities from harm and to comply with its obligations under the Genocide Convention. These developments, collectively, clarify the settled legal position with regards to Israel's violations of international law.
- **On 21 November 2024, the International Criminal Court (ICC)** took further action by issuing arrest warrants for Israeli leaders Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, citing that Israel has targeted the civilian population of Gaza as part of a widespread and systematic government policy. The warrants include charges of crimes against humanity of murder, the war crime of starvation systematic starvation and persecution of Palestinian populations.

Under Ofcom's Broadcasting Code, Rule 5.1 requires that news, in whatever form, be reported with due impartiality. The removal of the documentary without substantiated evidence of bias or inaccuracy, may constitute a breach of this obligation particularly if the same standard is not applied to content connected to the Israeli position.

In addition, Rule 7.1, concerning fairness and privacy, may be implicated if the BBC's action is perceived as unfairly targeting a minor contributor based on familial associations, rather than the content's veracity.

3. BBC's Due Diligence Process – Lack of Transparency & Timeline Request

The BBC has claimed that it has completed an "initial review" and will be conducting "a full fact-finding review". In the interim, the documentary will not be available on BBC platforms. However:

- No specific editorial concerns have been cited to justify its removal.

- No timeline has been provided for when the full fact-finding review will be completed.
- There has been no transparency regarding whether those connected with the full fact-finding review can be impartial investigators and whether these individuals will be vetted for links to the Israeli government or Israeli advocacy groups or indeed individuals suspected of committing war crimes.
- There has been no transparency regarding what external pressures have been applied, and whether Israeli advocacy groups, the IDF or the Israeli government influenced the BBC's decision.

Formal Requests for Justification & Action

Given the above, I request that the BBC:

1. Provide a specific timeline for the completion of its full fact-finding review and indicate whether reinstatement is being seriously considered.
2. Disclose the full criteria being used to assess whether the documentary complies with BBC Editorial Guidelines.
3. Issue a formal, written explanation detailing the editorial, legal, or regulatory grounds for decision already made to remove *Gaza: How to Survive a Warzone*.
4. Disclose any external lobbying efforts, complaints, or interventions that influenced this decision, including the nature and sources of these communications.
5. Commit to applying this same due diligence standard to Israeli narratives, particularly those produced in cooperation with the Israeli government and military.
6. Clarify whether the same standard of familial or associational scrutiny will be applied to Israeli contributors appearing in BBC documentaries, including *Surviving October 7th: We Will Dance Again*.
7. Reinstate the documentary on iPlayer unless there is a demonstrable breach of BBC guidelines.

Legal and Regulatory Consequences

If a satisfactory response is not provided within 14 days, I will escalate this complaint to:

- Ofcom, requesting an investigation into potential breaches of impartiality, fairness, and external influence under the Broadcasting Code.
- The BBC Trust, to assess whether this decision violates the BBC's public service obligations under the Royal Charter.
- Legal avenues, including potential public law challenges, should it be demonstrated that the BBC has acted in a manner that is arbitrary, discriminatory, or inconsistent with its statutory duties.

Conclusion

The BBC's removal of this documentary, without clear editorial justification, undermines its credibility as an impartial public broadcaster. Unless the BBC applies the same standards to Israeli narratives, this decision will be widely seen as a politically motivated act of censorship rather than a legitimate editorial judgment.

I urge the BBC to publicly clarify its position, commit to transparent, consistent editorial standards and ensure that Palestinian voices are not selectively silenced

I look forward to your response within the requested timeframe of 14 days.

Yours sincerely

Tayab Ali

Solicitor Advocate &

Director International Centre of Justice for Palestinians