

7 June 2016

Dear Mr. Morgan,

We are Wissam Zarqa and Bebars Mishal, we were guests on the Newsnight piece on Aleppo on 24 May.

Following the broadcasting of the piece on 24 May, we got in touch with Mr. Mark Lobel, who was our point of contact, via WhatsApp and expressed to him some reservations that we had with the reporting of the situation in our city. We are also in close coordination with Ms. Yasmine Nahlawi, who we understand has also brought some concerns to your consideration regarding the same piece on behalf of a network of Syrian groups within the UK.

We would like to put on record that we wholeheartedly agree with the statement that has been presented to yourself by UK-based Syrian groups. We found the Newsnight piece to be misleading in that it left viewers with an inaccurate description of the situation in Aleppo.

We would also like to stress the following points:

1. Aleppo is not, **and has never been**, a 'stronghold' of Daesh. Daesh's presence has always been confined to certain parts of Aleppo and the group has never held complete or overall control of the city. Aleppo is now under the general control of the moderate opposition groups which are fighting against both Assad and Daesh simultaneously. Newsnight's characterisation of Aleppo as a previous terrorist stronghold is extremely dangerous as it provides implicit justification for the Assad regime's bombardments which continue to rain on us day in and day out.
2. The Newsnight piece depicted the situation in Aleppo as being one of the Assad regime versus Daesh. This could not be further from the truth. It is well-known that Assad and Daesh work off of a relationship of mutual cooperation and that the groups bearing the brunt of their brutality are the civil society (i.e. Syria civil defense) and the moderate opposition. Sadly, your piece did not refer at all to the moderate forces. References to the 'rebels' within the piece were not provided any context, and as such the distinction between the rebels and Daesh was blurred.

Please note that as a result of this misleading reporting, and also because of the unsatisfactory manner by which the Newsnight team dealt with the statement presented to it by the Syrian groups, we are not inclined to deal with BBC Newsnight in the future. We hoped that you would deliver fair, balanced, and accurate reporting on the massacres occurring within our city by the Assad regime but sadly you used our interviews within a news piece which was deeply troubling for ourselves. It is exactly these types of actions, by the way, which have made Syrians distrustful of the wider international community, and increasingly so of BBC specifically (most particularly, BBC Arabic).

Sincerely,

Wissam Zarqa  
Bebars Mishal