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Press Complaints Commission

From the Chairman

Sir Nicholas Young
Chief Executive
British Red Cross
9 Grosvenor Crescent
London SW1X 7EJ

30th September 2004

Chairman

Sir Christopher Meyer

Members of the Commission

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Roger Alton

Professor The Lord Chan

Edmund Curran

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Dr. Arthur Hearnden

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Peter Hill

Paul Horrocks

Charles McGhee

Adam Phillips

Eve Salomon

Dianne Thompson

The Right Rev. John Waine KCVO

Director

Tim Toulmin

Dear Sir Nicholas,

Thank you for your letter of 15th September.

Let me explain in a little more detail what we can do at the PCC. By definition we will remain a largely reactive organisation because that is what a complaints service will always be. But, by the very fact of creating a parallel "jurisprudence" across our Code of Practice, our mission becomes also one of raising standards and building good practice in the newspaper industry.

We will often publicly censure a newspaper, when a complaint has been upheld and it has proved impossible to reconcile complainant and editor. But the most important point to emphasise is that the PCC process of responding to a complaint is one of dispute resolution. The aim is to bring the two sides together. Nine times out of ten the PCC is successful. This means that a complaint to the PCC can result in improved understanding between the newspaper and complainant, whether individual or organisation.

We also do a lot of "pro-active" things as well: spreading the word about the services the PCC offers, training journalists, working with the police family liaison officers, disseminating guidance notes to editors on good practice in reporting on sensitive issues, such as mental health.

This is a rather long-winded way of saying that if you feel that a newspaper has broken the PCC's Code of Practice, you should never be deterred from coming to us. We are always very happy to give informal advice before any complaint is made.

1 Salisbury Square London EC4Y 8JB Telephone 020 7353 1248 Facsimile 020 7353 8355
Textphone for deaf and hard of hearing: 020 7583 2264
email: complaints@pcc.org.uk web site: www.pcc.org.uk



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Beyond all this, I do not think we could go further and hold the ring, as it were, between the voluntary sector and editors. I am sure you have done this already: but my advice to the voluntary sector is the same as to the corporate. Put a really good press department in your organisation that is itself staffed by pro-active operators. Unlike the PCC, there is no structural reason for press officers/"corporate communicators" to be largely reactive. It would do no harm for you yourself occasionally to give interviews and to lunch national editors.

I enclose an information pack on the PCC, which includes the latest version of the Code of Practice.

*Yours sincerely,
Christopher Meyer*

Sir Christopher Meyer

Enc. Information pack