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From the Chairman

Your reference: EH/SL.ox.St John

18 January 2005

Dr Evan Harris MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr. Harris,

Thank you for your letter of 22nd December, which I have just received.

On the general point about the coverage of asylum seekers, I agree that it is important to ensure that standards of accuracy are high. That is why we have issued a specific Guidance Note on the subject. It is also why we have begun to scan every British newspaper for references to asylum seekers to satisfy ourselves that the guidance is being followed.

On the specific case that you raise, I am not sure that I agree that the newspaper elided the distinction between asylum seekers and illegal immigrants. It seems to me that the editorial talks about both illegal immigrants and those failed asylum seekers who 'go to ground'. This suggests that there are other failed asylum seekers who do not. I did not therefore read the piece to suggest that all failed asylum seekers were scroungers. It is not clear from your letter whether you have already written to the editor to ask about the basis for his editorial. That might be the best way to find out what evidence he has. If you think that there are possible issues under the Code of Practice about this or any other article, then I would advise you to make a formal complaint to us.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,
Christopher Meyer
Sir Christopher Meyer

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