

BCCSA dismisses complaints in the Lindsay Dentlinger 'Budget Speech coverage' matter

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On Wednesday 24 February 2021, during the coverage of the 2021 Budget Speech, eNCA's reporter Lindsay Dentlinger interviewed Freedom Front leader Mr Pieter Groenewald. After she had interviewed Mr Groenewald, Ms Dentlinger invited Mr Nqabayomzi Kwankwa from the United Democratic Movement to share his comments on the Budget Speech. As Mr Kwankwa approached the microphone he removed his mask and was immediately requested by the reporter to leave it on. Mr Groenewald, the previous interviewee, was not wearing his mask during his interview.

A copy of this video was posted on social media and sparked a furious debate around the reporter's action. The United Democratic Movement, together with 11 other complainants lodged complaints relating to this incident with the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA).

The complainants were aggrieved by the state of affairs surrounding the incident and were of the view that the reporter was racist because Mr Groenewald was not requested to wear a mask because he is white and that Mr Kwankwa was requested to keep his mask on because he is Black.

The Broadcasting Code of Conduct prohibits a broadcaster from broadcasting material which, judged within context, advocates hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion and which constitutes incitement to cause harm. The question that the BCCSA addressed was whether the reporter's request that Mr Kwankwa should not remove his mask justifies an inference of racial discrimination or advocacy of hatred based on race.

In its judgment released on Friday, 19 March 2021, the BCCSA found as follows:

- *There was no indication that the reporter's request to Mr Kwankwa to keep his mask on advocated hatred based on race against Black people. The broadcast has caused offence, as evidenced by these complaints before the BCCSA, but the broadcaster did not contravene clause 10.3 of the code.*
- *The BCCSA recognises past injustices that have led to sensitivity towards matters that involve race. Nevertheless,*

as shown above, the facts of this matter do not justify an inference of the advocacy of hatred against Black people. Some of the complainants have alleged that the broadcast impaired the dignity of Black people. There are several inferences that a reasonable viewer could have drawn from the broadcast, the most obvious of which was that current regulations demand that precautions must be taken to curb the spread of Covid-19.

- *After considering all the facts, it is found that the broadcaster did not contravene the code. The complaints are accordingly not upheld.*

“As a responsible broadcaster we are governed by the BCCSA code of conduct and are satisfied with the judgment made. ENCA understands how our reporter’s coverage created a space for general public conjecture and are sorry that her behaviour was perceived to be racist and offended viewers. However, we reiterate that our internal investigation found, like the BCCSA did, that her conduct was not racially motivated. We remain committed to providing fair and balanced news irrespective of race, colour or creed,” said Norman Munzhelele, managing director of eNCA.

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