

Lord Wakeham announces the withdrawal of the PCC from the World Association of Press Councils

Speaking at a conference today in New Delhi, hosted by the Commonwealth Press Union and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Lord Wakeham – Chairman of the Press Complaints Commission – announces that the Press Complaints Commission will be withdrawing from membership of the World Association of Press Councils (WAPC). He said:

“The Press Complaints Commission has been a member of the WAPC since it was founded. It was formed with the best of intentions and in its early years did much good work. However, our membership of the WAPC has seemed increasingly anomalous – for a number of reasons.

First, we disagreed strongly with plans touted by WAPC to establish some form of global press code and a trans-national body to oversee complaints under it. We feared that such a code would simply be used by authoritarian governments keen to extinguish freedom of expression – using a global code ostensibly designed to ensure ‘responsible journalism’ as the tool.

Second, we were concerned that the overwhelming majority of members of WAPC represent state run and funded press councils which are neither self regulatory nor independent. State run press councils – one of which is hosting the WAPC annual conference in April – are inimical to press freedom, and the PCC did not feel comfortable in a body dominated by them.

Third, we were aware that we were the only press council in Europe in membership of WAPC. Last year’s initiative by some 20 European press councils to establish the Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe – a loose knit alliance designed simply for the exchange of advice and information – has largely made our membership of WAPC irrelevant. I hope a proposed initiative by the Commonwealth Press Union may lead to the formation of a similar commonwealth body.

For all these reasons, the PCC has decided its membership of WAPC is no longer appropriate and to withdraw with immediate effect.”

ENDS

Further information:

1. Following the resignation of the PCC, current members of the WAPC include: Press Council of Bangladesh; Supreme Press Council of Egypt; Press Council of India; Nigerian Press Council; National Press Council of the Republic of China (Taiwan); Media Council of Tanzania; Turkish Press Council; Manitoba Press Council; Nepal Press Council; British Columbia Press Council; Australian Press Council; Fiji ,Media Council; Honolulu Community Media Council; Israeli Press Council; New Zealand Press Council; Sri Lanka Press Council.
2. This year’s Annual Meeting of the WAPC is being hosted by the Supreme Press Council of Egypt.

15 February 2000

Lord Wakeham pledges to tackle unfair reporting on mental health issues

In a speech today to a Capita Conference on "Improving Media Representations of Mental Health," organised in association with The Guardian, Lord Wakeham – Chairman of the Press Complaints Commission – sets out the role of the PCC in raising standards of reporting of mental health issues. He says that the media has a crucial role to play in "tackling public fear and misunderstanding" about mental illness:

"For that reason alone the relationship between the media, those suffering from mental illness, and those caring for them is a crucial one that needs to be got right. In that the PCC has a role to play – and it is one I am proud to champion. Discrimination in any of its ugly forms – on grounds of sex or sexual orientation, of race, or of mental illness – has no place in a modern society. And it certainly has no place in the media."

Lord Wakeham sets out how the newspaper industry's Code of Practice applies in this area – and is supplemented by the Commission's own guidelines on the reporting of mental health issues. Those guidelines remind all editors to take care not to describe those who are mentally ill in a way which might raise a breach of the Code in terms of inaccuracy or discrimination – and not to use language which is discriminatory to those suffering from mental illness or which might interfere with their care.

He outlines a number of adjudications where the PCC has upheld complaints on this subject because coverage has either been inaccurate or discriminatory – and says that the Code, these adjudications, and the PCC's guidelines are all helping to raise standards of reporting in this area:

"I have never been one to believe that you can change things overnight. It takes time to improve standards... But it is my instinctive belief that on this important subject things have changed for the better over the last few years, and are continuing to change... And it is something to which I promise you the PCC will continue to devote a great deal of time and effort."

ENDS

24 February 2000