

SECOND STATEMENT OF PADDY FRENCH, REBECCA TELEVISION

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I am the editor of the website RebeccaTelevision [rebeccatelevision.com]. This second statement follows my earlier statement, read into the Inquiry record on July 9, and is a response to Mazher Mahmood's fourth statement.

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I have now read Mazher Mahmood's fourth witness statement, part of which is a response to my statement.

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The Linklaters investigation shows that Mazher Mahmood did not tell the truth when he claimed, in his first statement, that 253 successful criminal prosecutions resulted from his work at the News of the World. Linklaters could find only 94 individuals compared with the 70 that Rebecca Television located.

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When Mr Mahmood gave evidence, under oath, that the figure had risen to 261, that statement was also untrue.

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To deflect the question of whether he committed perjury — that he deliberately made these claims knowing they were false — Mazher Mahmood deploys three arguments to explain why the figures came to be inflated.

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First, he says that he counted each significant charge against an individual — so that, according to him the 94 individuals Linklaters identified were guilty of 134 separate offences.

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The problem here is that the News of the World made claims about his successes which specifically talk about the number of individuals concerned.

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For example, in March 1996, the News of the World reported that the conviction of a solicitor “brings the total of villains successfully prosecuted after being exposed by Mazher to a staggering EIGHTY in four years.” (News of the World’s emphasis).

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Our research shows that, at that date, the tally of individuals convicted was 13 with a further 5 unnamed. (The figure may be higher due to the possibility that some of the 24 additional individuals discovered by Linklaters may have been convicted prior to March 1996.)

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However, even at that point, it is clear that Mazher Mahmood and the News of the World were already and substantially exaggerating his achievements.

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By April 2007 the paper was claiming “204 convicted”.

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The second excuse deployed is that Mazher Mahmood believed that more than 140 illegal immigrants who were deported were also the subject of criminal prosecutions. There are four problems with this assertion:

- the first is that it is impossible to justify this figure of 140 from reports in the News of the World: the articles on illegal immigration are generally vague as to what subsequently happens to the alleged illegal immigrants exposed by Mazher Mahmood
- the second is that he did not keep a record of the names of the people involved
- the third is that there is no independent evidence to support the fact that these people were illegal immigrants and were subsequently deported
- the final problem is that no experienced investigative journalist could credibly claim that deportations equalled criminal prosecution. There can be few journalists who have spent as much time in the courts as Mazher Mahmood and he must have known that they were not prosecuted. The same goes for the News of the World editorial staff and the paper's legal team.

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The third excuse is that he mistakenly included 13 professionals disciplined in his tally. But it is hard to believe that Mr Mahmood could have confused internal disciplinary procedures with criminal proceedings.

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When Mazher Mahmood resigned from the Sunday Times in 1988 to avoid being sacked, he will have known that even if he had been dismissed for gross

professional misconduct, it would not have given him a criminal record.

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Finally it is worth noting the role of the Inquiry itself in getting at the truth in this matter. No national newspaper picked up the allegations made in Rebecca Television's original article "A Case to Answer". Mazher Mahmood would not answer questions and Sunday Times editor John Witherow only confirmed he had commissioned an investigation into the claims when Channel 4 News began asking questions. (Channel 4 subsequently decided not to broadcast its planned piece.)

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It was, therefore, the Inquiry's decision to publish my first statement and to ask Mazher Mahmood to answer the questions raised in it that brought the proof that he had not told the truth under oath.

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I have written to Sunday Times editor John Witherow and asked him to supply

- the list of prosecutions which Mazher Mahmood gave to Linklaters
- a copy of the Linklaters' report so that we can verify and add the additional convictions to the Rebecca Television article "A Case To Answer"
- a detailed list of the 94 individuals Linklaters located and the 134 offences they were convicted of (if it is not given in the Linklaters report)

- the evidence to support Mr Mahmood's claim that more than 140 illegal immigrants were deported as a result of his work.

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This statement has been sent, as a matter of courtesy, to Mazher Mahmood and John Witherow at the Sunday Times.

I believe the facts stated in this statement are true.

Paddy French
10 September 2012