

# It's someone else's ABC ignoring facts



Piers Akerman

**A**BC boss Russell Balding is in serious need of a reality check. His response to my column last Tuesday was full of argument but light on facts, as Arnold Roth, the father of murdered Australian schoolgirl Malki Roth, lucidly demonstrated in his letter published in *The Daily Telegraph* on Saturday.

The bean counter's tasteless attack and threadbare defence clearly illustrated how profoundly the public broadcaster has lost its moral compass.

Unfortunately, such brainless bluster from the top appears to be in keeping with much of the ABC's warped culture of denial. Take the numerous complaints made about a Radio National broadcast just over a year ago in which reporter Peter Cave unequivocally asserted a massacre had taken place in Jenin in April, 2002.

The issue is of importance to Australian audiences as some Australian Muslims still believe that Israeli troops participated in the fictitious massacre, just as they choose to believe the US was behind the attacks on the World Trade Centre, despite Osama bin Laden's jubilant claim of responsibility, and that the US is a colonising power.

The ABC refuses to correct the record despite the fact that there have been two investigations, one by Human Rights Watch and the other by the UN, which have failed to support the claim.

The Human Rights Watch report, based on interviews with people present during the Jenin fighting, is straightforward. It states it "found no evidence to sustain claims of massacres or large-scale extrajudicial executions by the IDF [Israeli Defence Force] in Jenin refugee camp".

The UN report, compiled without a visit to Jenin, typically does not rule decisively either way. It appears to draw heavily on the Human Rights Watch report but does allow that an allegation by a Pales-

stinian Authority official that some 500 people had been killed "has not been substantiated in the light of the evidence that has emerged".

Not good enough for the ABC, however, which remains the sole Western media outlet to maintain its curious but inflammatory view that a massacre took place.

A rational national broadcaster would recognise its serious error and atone and any examination of the record and the investigators' reports would indicate that the ABC has a clear responsibility to correct Cave's report.

**'Under the ABC's risible complaints procedure, either the MD or the convenor of its ridiculously titled panel calls the shots'**

But those who have asked for a correction have been treated very shabbily indeed.

When ABC listener Ralph Zwier sought a review of Cave's explicit report, he was told that the Independent Complaints Review Panel (ICRP) would first see whether it would accept the complaint. It did not.

In a patronising response, ICRP convenor Ted Thomas tartly told Mr Zwier: "You and I surely cannot be certain how all Western media dealt with the story."

He then went on to split hairs over whether the ABC's charter meant it was required

to be a "mainstream" or a "specialist" broadcaster and dismissed the charter's requirement for balance and impartiality with the thought that "it does not require them to be unquestioning.."

Mr Zwier then asked if the "independent" panel would clarify the criteria on which it determined whether to review complaints. He was told that it's up to the convenor of the ICRP—that is, it's arbitrary.

Under the ABC's risible complaints procedure, either the managing director or the convenor of its ridiculously titled panel call the shots if they are of the opinion that a complainant "alleges a sufficiently serious case of bias, lack of balance or unfair treatment to warrant independent review; or is a matter of public notoriety which warrants such a review".

While some Muslims in this country continue to claim a massacre took place in Jenin, despite all the proven facts, and use this assertion to reinforce their ridiculous claims about a global conspiracy against their religion, it is obvious the matter is serious.

That it is a matter of public notoriety goes without saying.

The ICJS is now considering whether to take the complaint to the Australian Broadcasting Authority, the next link in the chain.

It is to be hoped that they will pursue this option – and forward copies of all the correspondence to Communications Minister Richard Alston, Senator George Brandis and Opposition leader Simon Crean.

The ABC's refusal to correct the record and apologise about the Jenin claim indicates "our" ABC belongs to Yasser Arafat's propaganda unit.