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Channel 4's Naked Fabrication

Has the ratings success of Channel 4's Naked Attraction encouraged the producers to move into Naked Fabrication? This question is legitimate with reference to the latest broadcast of Phil Cox's "Hunted in Sudan", a failed attempt to undermine Sudan's improving regional and international status. The desperate freelancer was commissioned to bring "bad news" from Darfur, no matter the reality there was, because, and to the disappointment of Channel 4 and Mr Cox, the region has lately 'dropped off the international radar' for all the good reasons.

The film is not worthy of the name documentary, it is rather a cinematic movie which tells a pathetic story of a person who is desperately looking for false allegations to cast against the Government of Sudan. He sought the help of smugglers to sneak to the country illegally without applying for a visa or entering through a proper entry port to the country.

Smugglers are invariably involved in human trafficking, drugs, arms and money laundering. It is not surprising that Mr Cox and his translator were arrested by the relevant Sudanese Border Forces. What else did he expect?! In the "film", visual and sound effects are used instead of real footages. Loading the film with allegations of torture and beatings will not help to make false claims true. The truth is straightforward and simple. Mr Cox and his companion were arrested for entering the country illegally, detained for investigation while they were both well treated. The British embassy in Khartoum was duly notified, consular access was secured twice, and two representatives of Channel 4 visited the Embassy of Sudan in London on 9th January 2017, and offered a formal apology to the Sudanese Ambassador about the illegal entry. Both the British embassy in Khartoum and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office expressed appreciation for the way Mr Cox was treated. There was no mention of complaint or ill treatment. Top-level ministerial contacts followed and resulted in a Presidential pardon for Mr Cox.

Channel 4 commissioned Mr Cox for this task knowing in advance that he would enter the country illegally without any consideration or respect for Sudan's sovereignty. Their goal was to make up news about Darfur, trying desperately to put it back in the international radar. Mr Cox and Channel 4 have not done their homework well. Darfur is no longer "Breaking News" since General M. Agwai (Head of the AU-UN Mission) declared in August 2009: *"As of today I would not say that there is a war going on in Darfur"*. In 2011 The Doha Document for Peace in Darfur was signed with unanimous international support. The Darfur Regional Authority embarked on a highly successful reconstruction and rehabilitation programme that included building of schools, clinics and hospitals, motorways, bridges, universities and development projects. The UN documented that the remnants of Darfur rebel groups have found a safe haven in South Sudan and Libya where they are employed as mercenaries in conflicts. Unfortunately for Mr Cox and Channel 4, a statement by Ambassador Mathew Rycroft (UK Permanent to the UN) was published one day before the broadcast of the film. Ambassador Rycroft said clearly: *"In recent months, we have seen a welcome absence of violence between the Government of Sudan and opposition groups. We've seen UNAMID granted access to areas previously cut off. Vital humanitarian assessments are now underway."* He urged the Sudanese Government to persist along this path and address the root causes of conflict, a duty which is already being tackled by reconstruction. Similarly and on the same day, the current UNAMID head, Jeremiah N. Mamabolo said the following about his task: *"Darfur of today is a very different place from what this region was in 2003 when the armed conflict began and from that of a year ago"*. Both Channel 4 and Mr Cox seemed to be unaware of the fact that the UN Security Council is deliberating on the best means to draft an "Exit Strategy" for the UNAMID (UN and AU mission in Darfur) to reflect the developments and the reality on the ground.

When the Embassy of Sudan's Media Attaché was given a chance to respond on 6 April, the channel deleted most of the salient points he made in the interview on the website. Channel 4 cannot be proud of any part of this episode which puts a question mark about its standards and what it is ready to do in search of ratings success.

Press Section

Sudan Embassy,

London, 7th April 2017