

SUBJECT
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cc: Pro
**PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE**
SERIAL No. T 247/86

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

24 December 1986

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your letter of 6 August which reached me through your Embassy in Paris only many weeks later, in which you expressed concern about a report in the BBC Somali Service.

I am sorry that I have not been able to reply sooner. I wished, however, to make sure that your concerns had been thoroughly investigated. I understand that the Managing Director of BBC External Broadcasting has now written to you to express his regrets and that the Head of the BBC African Service visited Djibouti this month for discussions with your officials. As you know, we greatly value the traditional friendly relations we enjoy with Djibouti, which were highlighted in the evacuation following the fighting in Aden earlier this year. I very much hope that the recent visit has put matters right. This would be in the interests of both our countries.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely
Raymond Halliday

His Excellency Mr. Barkat Gourak Hamedou

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

22 December 1986

Dear Charles,

Letter to the Prime Minister from the Prime Minister of Djibouti

On 27 October we received from our Embassy in Paris the enclosed letter dated 6 August to the Prime Minister from Mr Barkat Gourak Hamedou, the Prime Minister of Djibouti, in which he draws to the Prime Minister's attention a complaint by his Director of Information in March about the negative representation of Djibouti by the BBC Somali Service. The Djibouti complaint centres on the Somali Service's mention in the press review on 12 February of an unflattering article published in the Daily Mail on 27 January headlined "The Town which gets Stoned" about the use in Djibouti of 'Kat', a mild narcotic similar to marijuana.

More recently, the President of Djibouti has complained orally to our Ambassador (based in Sana'a) on 11 November about an interview with a political opponent broadcast by the Somali Service on 12 September. That broadcast consisted of a direct attack implying waste and corruption on the part of the President of Djibouti by a former Minister of Commerce, Tourism and Trade currently condemned in absentia to life imprisonment.

We drew these complaints to the attention of the BBC External Services and pointed out that this is not the first time that the Somali Service has caused offence. (You will remember that the Prime Minister wrote to the President of Somalia in response to his complaint about a broadcast early in 1985). The BBC have told us that they replied on 3 April to the Djibouti Director of Information about the Djibouti Prime Minister's complaint and argued that the broadcast in question was balanced in the wider context of programme output at the time and that Somali officials were given, but did not take, the opportunity to reply. The BBC had also referred to the positive coverage given by the External Services of Djibouti's role in the evacuation of foreign nationals from Aden and to their full reporting of the North East African Summit meeting in Djibouti.

With regard to the President's complaints, the BBC tell us they sought an early response from either the President or his Government but were told that the moment was inopportune. The BBC point out however that despite this the Somali Service were able to broadcast a report on

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19 September of a Presidential speech in which he referred to "baseless and unfounded rumours which have manifested themselves in distribution of pamphlets and in broadcasts by foreign radio stations" and which were "not worth responding to".

We have made clear to the BBC that we consider it very unsatisfactory that the Presidents of both Djibouti and Somalia have felt obliged to complain to the Prime Minister about the Somali Service. The BBC External Services have acknowledged that there have been mistakes of editorial judgement in the Service and the Managing Director has written direct to the Prime Minister of Djibouti to express his sincere regrets that certain broadcasts may have unintentionally upset the Somali Government. He also arranged for the Head of the African Service to visit Djibouti last week where he was cordially received by officials for discussions on how to restore their relationship and credibility with the Government. The BBC have stressed, and this is confirmed by the Embassy in Mogadishu and HM Ambassador to Djibouti, that the Somali Service has an impressive following and there has been no suggestion, even by the local Governments, that the Service should be closed down. In general they are flattered that we take sufficient interest in their corner of the world to broadcast from London in Somali.

Under pressure from us, the BBC have been monitoring the Somali Service output more closely and a new programme organiser is being recruited [redacted]

[redacted] We have put the BBC External Services on notice that friendly relations with the Djibouti and Somali Governments might be in jeopardy as a result of the impact of the Somali Service and that we shall need to look closely during the next Prescription Committee meeting in March/April at whether this output can be said to be "in the national interest" or whether its resources could be better spent on something else. The BBC are under no illusions that they have to improve their editorial control and take more seriously the sensitivities of the local authorities.

I enclose a draft letter for the Prime Minister to send to the Prime Minister of Djibouti indicating that she has passed on the complaints to the BBC, and that she understands that the BBC have expressed their sincere regrets and intend to monitor the Service much more closely.

Yours sincerely,
A C Galsworthy

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

(A C Galsworthy)
Private Secretary

DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despatch/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM:
The Prime Minister

Reference

DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO:

Your Reference

- Top Secret
- Secret
- Confidential
- Restricted
- Unclassified

HE Mr Barkat Gourak Hamedou
Prime Minister of the Republic of
Djibouti

Copies to:

OG 28PS

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT:

.....In Confidence

Thank you for your letter of 6 August which reached
me through your Embassy in Paris, *only many weeks later* in which you expressed
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evacuation following the fighting in Aden earlier this
year. I very much hope that the recent visit has put
matters right, *this* which would be ~~very much~~ in the
interests of both our countries.

With best wishes.

Enclosures—flag(s).....



REPUBLIQUE DE DJIBOUTI

جمهورية جيبوتي

LE PREMIER MINISTRE

رئيس الوزراء

Unité - Egalité - Paix

PRIME MINISTER'S

PERSONAL MESSAGE

SERIAL No. T148B(iii)/86

الوحدة - المساواة - السلام

N° 516 /PM

رقم 6 AOUT 1986

SUBJECT CC MASTER
OPS

YOUR EXCELLENCY,

1 March
I have the honour to submit to Your Excellency a copy of letter which has been just sent to the BBC by the Secretary General of Information of the Republic of Djibouti.

I very much regret to initiate this personal correspondence with Your Excellency on a complaining note, particularly in view of the excellent relations that our two countries have consistently maintained.

The warmth and cordiality with which our Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation has been received during his recent visit to your great country reflected better the mutual esteem our two countries have for each other.

May I draw Your Excellency's attention to the gravity of the charges made against the Republic of Djibouti and the scarcity of factual for the same basis. We appreciate the freedom of opinion enjoyed in the United Kingdom by the media, naturally including the external services of the BBC. Such freedom however presumably covers only the opinions expressed, and obviously falls far short of a licence to invent the facts needed to portray the Republic of Djibouti as a country on the verge of political and financial disintegration.

As Your Excellency may know, the BBC allegations are particularly damaging to a country like the Republic of Djibouti whose main asset is its reputation for financial stability of its economy and finance.

The competent organs of the Republic are studying the legal and other remedial options available to the Republic of Djibouti against the BBC. However, as Your Excellency know such options at best compensatory, and can in no way undo the damage caused.

A third-world country like Djibouti is therefore completely defenceless against first-world onslaughts of this type. As her Majesty's government in the United Kingdom has strongly opposed proposals

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like those of unesco for alleviating some of the media handicap of the ways and means available to us to protect ourselves against such greatly damaging half truths and pure inventions vouched for by the immense resources, prestige and credibility of the BBC.

I can assure Your Excellency's that we in Djibouti are determined that this unfortunate attack of the BBC. Will not disturb the traditional friendship linking our two countries.

Please, my Excellency's accept my highest considerations my most cordial feelings.

HER EXCELLENCY
MARGARET THATCHER
PRIME MINISTER OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM
LONDON

