

The Secretary
New Zealand Press Council
PO Box 10-879
Wellington

19 March 2007

Dear Sir or Madam,

I wish to make a number of points in response to correspondence from North & South regarding the article Asian Angst: Is it time to send some back?

While pleased that a response to the complaint lodged on behalf of the Asia New Zealand Foundation has been finally received from North & South, I wish to underline that it is unsatisfactory in explaining several fundamental issues that undermine North & South's claims that its editorial and journalistic processes were rigorous and balanced.

Firstly, there is the issue of statistical selectivity. As has been demonstrated by a number of sources, there is no evidence to indicate that crime committed by Asians is disproportionately higher than crime committed by non-Asians. North & South are also guilty of providing a picture of crime committed by Asians that is totally out of context of overall crime in New Zealand.

Secondly, there is little in the publication's response to demonstrate that the subjective rhetoric evident in the article is not specifically hostile to Asian communities. The Australian term for this political and journalistic practice is dog whistling – pitching a calculated signal at a frequency that resonates with or reinforces existing prejudices.

It should also be noted that the author's repeated reference to the existence of an Asian crime unit is disingenuous. Its existence is not evidence that 'Asian crime' is a disproportionate concern for the police but rather that it is one small part of an entire organisation dedicated to crime fighting in New Zealand.

The author could also have included the views of one of several Asian members of the police force who are involved in working closely with Asian communities. The New Zealand Police now have one Chinese ethnic strategy adviser, three Asian liaison officers and over 50 ethnic Chinese police officers. It is interesting that none of their views were sought.

Finally, the lack of Asian voices or perspectives in the article is fatally damaging to any argument put up by North & South that the article was fair and balanced. To underline this statement, I am enclosing a copy of a letter written to North & South by iBall editor Lincoln Tan disowning the comments attributed to him in the article. Imagine an article about the Waitangi Treaty settlement process that didn't include perspectives in Maoridom. Without a range of representative views from Asian communities, North & South cannot claim that Asian Angst was an article that was fair and balanced. It is as fundamental as that.

It is interesting that North & South has steadfastly refused to acknowledge any editorial failure. That is their prerogative. While publishing a number of letters critical of the article has an ameliorating effect on the harm that the article has inflicted on the way Asian communities are perceived in New Zealand, I am even more convinced for the reasons given of the need for North & South to make some kind of concession that it did not do all it could have to ensure that Asian communities were treated fairly in its editorial decision making.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Mabbett
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Asia New Zealand Foundation