

29 March 2007

Mary Major
Secretary of the Press Council
NZ Press Council
PO Box 10-879
The Terrace
Wellington

Dear Ms Major,

Re: Complaint regarding *North & South*'s "Asian Angst" article and the magazine's response to criticism of the article.

Recently, *North & South* published an article about Asian crime ("Asian Angst", *North & South*, December 2006, pages 38-47). A storm of protest greeted the article (*North & South*, January 2007, pages 12-14). The substance of the criticism made by Keith Ng (*North & South*, January 2007, page 13) was that, although the number of crimes committed by Asians has risen over the years, the number of Asians in New Zealand has increased by far more.

In January 2007 *North & South* published a rejection of such criticism. The article's author, Deborah Coddington, said Mr Ng did not use populations and time periods that matched those used in the article (*North & South*, January 2007, page 13). I wish to complain about the article and this response. In my view, the original article and *North & South*'s response contravene Principle 1 of the Press Council principles – accuracy, fairness and balance. If one does use the populations and time periods used in the article, it is clear that the original article was incorrect. It also means Ms Coddington's response was groundless. I base my analysis on statistics I obtained from Statistics New Zealand on March 9, 2007. I had to make a special request for this information, which was not available earlier.

To obtain a clear picture of Asian crime we need to calculate the crime rate - the number of reported crimes as a proportion of the population. This is the standard statistical measure of the incidence of crime. The crime rate did not appear in the article or in any of the subsequent discussion. I have calculated the crime rate, using data for the time periods and populations used in the article.

I quote the customary crime rate: the number of reported crimes per every 10,000 people in the population. It is calculated as the number of reported crimes divided by the relevant population and then multiplied by 10,000. The two time periods quoted in the article were 1996 and 2005 (*North & South*, December 2006, page 44). Obtaining population statistics for 1996 was straightforward, as a census was conducted that year. There was no census in 2005, but by using census data from 2001 and 2006 I calculated robust population estimates for 2005 using interpolation, a standard

statistical procedure. The Asian population *North & South* used was Asians (excluding Indians) aged 17 to 50. That is the Asian population I quote here.

As the article noted, in 1996 the number of crime apprehensions for Asians was 1791. The total population of Asians that year was 78,513. The Asian crime rate in 1996 was therefore 228.1 crimes per 10,000 Asians. In 2005 the number of crime apprehensions for Asians was 2752 (the article said 2751). The estimated total population of Asians that year was 142,527. The crime rate was therefore 193.1 crimes per 10,000 Asians.

The Asian crime rate therefore *fell* by 15 per cent between 1996 and 2005. The rising wave of Asian crime that alarmed *North & South* does not exist. As the Asian population rose, so Asians were committing proportionately less crime, not more. The substance of the criticism Mr Ng made of the article was therefore correct, and Ms Coddington was in error to reject this criticism. Yes, as she noted, the number of crime apprehensions for Asians rose by 53 per cent (actually, 54 per cent) across the period, but by failing to take into account the rise in the Asian population over the same period (a rise of 82 per cent) she presented an incorrect picture of Asian crime.

North & South also claimed the rising Asian crime wave was greater than that for Pacific Islanders. But the crime rate was 1091.2 per 10,000 Pacific Islanders aged 17 to 50 in 1996, and 1041.3 in 2005. That is, in 2005 the Pacific Island crime rate was over five times that for Asians. Granted, the Pacific Island crime rate did fall across the period, but by only five per cent. The Asian crime rate fell by three times that. Again, the facts directly contradict the article.

For the entire New Zealand population, the crime rate was 801.9 per 10,000 New Zealanders aged 17 to 50 in 1996, and 772.4 in 2005. In other words, in 2005 the crime rate for all New Zealanders was four times that for Asians. Clearly, Asians are far more law-abiding than the general population.

I wrote to *North & South* on 12 March outlining my concerns. I sent this letter fastpost – *North & South* should have received the letter on 13 March. I received no reply. On 26 March I sent an email, requesting a reply from *North & South*. I received a reply the same day from *North & South*, saying it had only received my letter “recently” and that “it may take a little longer to reply” as the magazine was on deadline. To date, I have received no reply.

Copies of all documentation are enclosed.

Yours sincerely,

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12 March 2007

Robyn Langwell
Editor
North & South
Private Bag 92 512
Wellesley Street
AUCKLAND 1141

Dear Ms Langwell,

Re: *North & South's* response to criticism of its "Asian Angst" article (*North & South*, January 2007, pages 12-14).

Recently, *North & South* published an article about Asian crime ("Asian Angst", *North & South*, December 2006, pages 38-47). A storm of protest greeted the article (*North & South*, January 2007, pages 12-14). The essence of the critics' complaints was that, although the number of crimes committed by Asians has risen over the years, the number of Asians in New Zealand has increased by far more.

In January 2007 you published a rejection of such criticism. You said the magazine's task is to "investigate and bring into the light issues that are engaging and disturbing thinking New Zealanders" (*North & South*, January 2007, page 14). The article's author, Deborah Coddington, said the critics did not use populations and time periods that matched those used in the article. She called upon her critics to compare "like with like" (*North & South*, January 2007, page 13). In this letter I do that.

To obtain a clear picture of Asian crime we need to calculate the crime rate - the number of reported crimes as a proportion of the population. This is the standard statistical measure of the incidence of crime. The crime rate did not appear in the article or in any of the subsequent criticism. I have calculated the crime rate, using data from Statistics New Zealand for the time periods and populations used in the article. I made a special request to Statistics New Zealand for this material, which I received from the agency on March 9, 2007.

I quote the customary crime rate: the number of reported crimes per every 10,000 people in the population. It is calculated as the number of reported crimes divided by the relevant population and then multiplied by 10,000.

The two time periods quoted in the article were 1996 and 2005 (*North & South*, December 2006, page 44). Obtaining population statistics for 1996 was straightforward, as a census was conducted that year. There was no census in 2005, but by using census data from 2001 and 2006 I calculated robust population estimates for 2005 using interpolation, a standard statistical procedure. The Asian population *North & South* used was Asians (excluding Indians) aged 17 to 50. That is the Asian population I quote here.

As the article noted, in 1996 the number of crime apprehensions for Asians was 1791. The total population of Asians that year was 78,513. The Asian crime rate in 1996 was therefore 228.1 crimes per 10,000 Asians. In 2005 the number of crime apprehensions for Asians was 2752 (the article said 2751). The estimated total population of Asians that year was 142,527. The crime rate was therefore 193.1 crimes per 10,000 Asians.

The Asian crime rate therefore *fell* by 15 per cent between 1996 and 2005. The rising wave of Asian crime that alarmed *North & South* does not exist. As the Asian population rose, so Asians were committing proportionately less crime, not more.

Ms Coddington's error was to do only part of the analysis. Yes, as she noted, the number of crime apprehensions for Asians rose by 53 per cent (actually, 54 per cent) across the period, but by failing to take into account the rise in the Asian population over the same period (a rise of 82 per cent) she presented an incorrect picture of Asian crime.

North & South also claimed the rising Asian crime wave was greater than that for Pacific Islanders. But the crime rate was 1091.2 per 10,000 Pacific Islanders aged 17 to 50 in 1996, and 1041.3 in 2005. That is, in 2005 the Pacific Island crime rate was over five times that for Asians. Granted, the Pacific Island crime rate did fall across the period, but by only five per cent. The Asian crime rate fell by three times that. Again, the facts directly contradict the article.

For the entire New Zealand population, the crime rate was 801.9 per 10,000 New Zealanders aged 17 to 50 in 1996, and 772.4 in 2005. In other words, in 2005 the crime rate for all New Zealanders was four times that for Asians. Clearly, Asians are far more law-abiding than the general population.

I believe I have addressed the issues *North & South* raised in January 2007 to defend its article. I would be interested in your comments.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Grant Hannis
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