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**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL  
ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

CFRA-AM re International Women's Day

(CBSC Decision 95/96-0157)

Decided October 21, 1996

A. MacKay (Chair), R. Stanbury (Vice-Chair), P. Fockler, T. Gupta,  
M. Hogarth, M. Ziniak

**THE FACTS**

On March 14, 1996, CFRA-AM (Ottawa) broadcast a story on its 5 pm newscast concerning International Women's Day. The text of the news item was as follows:

It's not a statutory holiday yet but today is International Women's Day and, as Angela Hicks tells us, women are patting themselves on the back. If you go by the numbers, you might still say every day is International Men's Day. Stats Canada reports women spend almost twice as much time taking care of the house and kids as men do. And for full time work outside the home, we earn an average of 72 cents on their dollar. Well, the YMCA-YWCA of Ottawa-Carleton thinks it's time to recognize the overlooked among us. Their Women of Distinction Award has gone to everyone from community volunteers to corporate executives. And this year, the award will go to ...

**The Letter of Complaint**

Although the complainant's letter is dated March 13, there is every reason to believe that this was a simple typographical error. The letter was, in any event, received by the CRTC on March 19.

The news story commented on "International Women's Day/Week" making the claim that women earn 70 cents for a dollar that men earn, so every other day (364 days) were International Men's Days.

Now I have organized International Men's Day in Ottawa for the past three years and I find this comment offensive, unfair and violates just about every principle of your code on portrayal of men and women. The 70/100 ratio of earnings means 41% and 59% or, applied to 365 days, 215 days for men, 150 days for women. However, if we apply the ratio of media coverage of men's and women's issues on CFRA to the division of "days" I could reasonably argue CFRA allocates 364+ days to women and less than a day to men. CFRA did not report on our International Men's Day (Feb. 12). Government funding for "International Women's Day" and (years and weeks) is 100% to women only and CFRA used this news broadcast to jeer at an unfunded grassroots day organized by men to portray positive images of masculinity.

### **The Broadcaster's Response**

The General Manager of the station responded to the complainant on April 2. His comments were as follows:

Your specific concern is an item which was broadcast as part of CFRA's 5:00 p.m. news regarding International Women's Day/Week. Your contention is that this story violated the CRTC's policy on gender portrayal. You also state that "...I could reasonably argue CFRA allocates 364+ days to women and less than a day to men."

[W]e have reviewed the broadcast in question. It was news, the reporting of factual information. It was International Women's Week and the story and content reflected that. In no way was this story a violation of the CRTC's policy on gender portrayal. The story was a reflection of a "world scale" event of interest to a diverse group of men and women.

CFRA reports news of interest and concern to the community regardless of the gender of the newsmaker. Issues important to both genders are represented on CFRA in a fair and balanced manner each and every time.

[C]ould your displeasure with CFRA's coverage of International Women's Day be rooted in your involvement with an organization of International Men's Day in Ottawa?

The viewer was unsatisfied with this response and requested, on May 31, that the CBSC refer the matter to the appropriate Regional Council for adjudication.

### **THE DECISION**

The CBSC's Ontario Regional Council considered the complaint under the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code* of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) and the *CAB Code of Ethics*.

#### *Sex-Role Portrayal Code, Clause 2: Diversity*

- (c) Television and radio programming shall respect the principles of intellectual and emotional equality of both sexes and the dignity of all individuals.

Television and radio programming should portray women and men as equal beneficiaries of the positive attributes of family or single-person life. Women and men should perform in a range of occupations and function as intellectual and emotional equals in all types of thematic circumstances. This should be the case for both work and leisure activities requiring varying degrees of intellectual competence.

*Guidance:* Women and men should be portrayed as working toward a comfortable existence through mutual support, both economically and emotionally, and in both public and private spheres. Despite the problems of societal systemic discrimination, television and radio programming should reflect an awareness of the need to avoid and overcome discrimination on the basis of gender.

*Code of Ethics, Clause 6(1): News:*

It shall be the responsibility of member stations to ensure that news shall be represented with accuracy and without bias. The member station shall satisfy itself that the arrangements made for obtaining news ensure this result. It shall also ensure that news broadcasts are not editorial. News shall not be selected for the purpose of furthering or hindering either side of any controversial public issue, nor shall it be designed by the beliefs or opinions or desires of the station management, the editor or others engaged in its preparation or delivery. The fundamental purpose of news dissemination in a democracy is to enable people to know what is happening, and to understand events so that they may form their own conclusions.

The Regional Council members reviewed a tape of the program in question as well as the correspondence. The Council concludes that the broadcaster did not breach either Clause 2(c) of the *Sex Role Portrayal Code* or Clause 6 of the *CAB Code of Ethics*.

**The Content of the Program**

Contrary to the other decisions rendered today regarding matters raised by this complainant against CFRA, namely, *CFRA-AM re Family Fortune* (CBSC Decision 95/96-0145, October 21, 1996), *CFRA-AM re PSA* (CBSC Decision 95/96-0149, October 21, 1996) and *CFRA-AM re Dr. Tomorrow* (CBSC Decision 95/96-0152, October 21, 1996), this case involves a news story which drew together International Women's Day and the YMCA-YWCA of Ottawa-Carleton's Women of Distinction Award. In the telling of the story, the reporter reached for more information which she presumably considered would be of interest to the public, namely, the Statistics Canada salary information. This was not an opinion piece and, unless it was seriously inaccurate in its factual presentation, the Council does not consider that it would give rise to a breach of Clause 6 of the *Code of Ethics*.

Furthermore, the fact that CFRA-AM may or may not have reported the complainant's International Men's Day does not enter into *this* discussion. It certainly must be true that not every special "Day" is reported on in the news and it

would not be reasonable or possible for every broadcaster to report on every such day. While statutory holidays and other days such as Valentine's Day are so recognized, most others are not. International Women's Day may generally attract more press and may be falling closer on the spectrum to Valentine's Day than to Guy Fawkes Day, whereas International Men's Day may not yet have a following at all. Until it does, it is unlikely that either broadcasters or the written press will have an interest in reporting its annual arrival. As to whether International Men's Day receives the Government funding which it deserves is not a matter for this Council to consider and whether the absence of such governmental recognition contributes to the unfamiliarity of the Day is also beyond the CBSC's concern. The complainant does not, however, have an entitlement to complain about any lack of balance in the treatment of men's and women's issues on the simple basis of the comparison of the treatment of the respective International Days.

Members consider that the report was a statement of facts, in no way intended to, or having the effect of, exploiting or abusing men. As the Council decided today in *CFRA-AM re Dr. Tomorrow* (CBSC Decision 95/96-0152, October 21, 1996), "It is critical to the understanding of the Council's view of inequitable treatment to appreciate that the praising of one group does not imply any degradation of the other." It is equally true that, by reporting on a story highlighting women, the station did not discriminate against men, did not select news in order to further or hinder one side of a controversial issue and did not exploit men. Thus, in the Council's opinion, CFRA is not in breach of either the *Code of Ethics* or the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code*.

### **The Broadcaster's Response**

In addition to assessing the relevance of the Codes to the complaint, the CBSC always assesses the *responsiveness* of the broadcaster to the substance of the complaint. The Council considers that the General Manager's letter dealt appropriately with the issue raised and was an entirely proper response. Nothing more is required.

*This decision is a public document upon its release by the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council. It may be reported, announced or read by the station against which the complaint had originally been made; however, in the case of a favourable decision, the station is under no obligation to announce the result.*