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**To:**

**Director-General of the BBC - Tim Davie  
Chairman of the Board of Directors of the BBC - Richard Sharp**

**30th November 2022**

**Dear Tim and Richard,**

We are writing to you from the Black Equity Organisation, the UK's national Black civil rights organisation, which launched earlier this year to advocate for Black communities in Britain and to work towards dismantling systemic racism.

Following news stories about the proposed cuts to BBC Local Radio, we, along with the other signatories to this letter, are concerned about the devastating impact this will have on Black and Asian programmes and the licence fee payers who rely on these programmes as vital sources of community news.

Unlike other communities, Black people in Britain have no dedicated national broadcast channel with news, current affairs and topical issues specific to their lives. There are 3.2 million people of Black heritage in the UK. In an average week, this audience only has 2 hours of dedicated programming, primarily from where they live via BBC Local radio.

By contrast, BBC Alba, a channel that caters to the Gaelic community and speakers, broadcasts daily for up to 7 hours to an audience of around 57,000. And yet there is no suggestion of any cuts to its budget. We are not saying there should be, but it is important to highlight this worrying discrepancy.

It is of extreme concern that the little Black audiences have, is in danger of being taken away.

As you will be aware, under clause 14 of the BBC Charter, the organisation has a responsibility to "reflect the diverse communities of the whole of the United Kingdom in the content of its output" and "ensure that its output and services overall...represent...the diverse communities of the whole of the United Kingdom" and finally, "The BBC must ensure that it meets the needs of the diverse communities of the whole of the United Kingdom."

To this end, the proposed cuts could seem questionable as BBC Local radio stations across the country play a vital role in ethnic community engagement. The BBC's own Radio Commissioning says that the majority of the audience for BBC Local Radio is over 50, which is the station's stated target audience. We know that during the Covid crisis, they were a key source of information, particularly for ethnic minority audiences who were hesitant to take the vaccine. There have also been forums to discuss health issues such as sickle cell, which affects Black people in particular, and the Windrush Scandal, as well as the broader issues of race and racism.

Black Equity Organisation (BEO) CIO is a charitable incorporated organisation, registered with the Charity Commission of

Our registered office is 86-90 Paul Street, London, EC2A 4NE



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We all know the importance of communities hearing from voices they trust and, up until now, Black and Asian local audiences have had the opportunity of listening to trusted journalists such as Devon Daley, Karen Gabay, Bridgitte Tetteh and Edward Adoo, among others.

For these older audiences, we know that these radio shows, presenters and producers are a lifeline for people in our communities. Many have the radio in the background and it's part of their daily lives. Older licence fee payers who rely on these local stations and their Black and Asian shows love the content, including the specialist music – now face being sidelined. Trying to drive these audiences online isn't feasible. Podcasts don't bind communities together in the same way as linear radio and they are not as agile.

How do these changes fit with the BBC's responsibility to ensure that its output and services represent and meet the needs of the diverse communities of the United Kingdom?

As well as providing trusted voices, BBC Local radio also offers an opportunity for grassroots organisations who rely on them to share essential news that impacts the lives of local audiences. The stations are a vital way for local MPs to communicate key local issues that won't get attention any other way. At a time when regional newspapers and even special ethnic press are facing challenges, it's clear that now, more than ever, BBC Local programmes that serve diverse audiences must remain a part of the broadcaster's offering.

Additionally, we have concerns about the BBC's commitment to its stated diversity targets. These changes to programmes and personnel will be a blow to Black and Asian talent both on and off screen as many could lose their jobs, and this also impacts the talent pipeline. For many talented broadcasters and production staff, local radio has been a key route into the BBC, especially those from communities who don't have a network or contacts to get them through the door.

In conclusion, we ask that:

1. There should not be a reduction of bespoke local broadcast hours produced for local Black and Asian licence-fee payers.
2. There should be no reduction in total staff salary and production spend on programme content for Black and Asian communities by local radio.

The current provision of local radio news for Black and Asian communities is a vital part of the overall media ecosystem. Any cuts, even if applied equally across the BBC, would disproportionately impact Black media professionals and journalism across the UK.

While we recognise the need for the BBC to have the power to change the shape and offering of its programming, we believe that we must safeguard the provision of content for Black and Asian communities.

For this to happen, we must immediately reverse this wrong decision.

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Yours sincerely,

The Rt Hon Diane Abbott MP

Amna Abdullatif, Co Funder Three Hijabis

Abdullah Afzal, Actor and Comedian

Mohammed Ali Aerosol, Founder Soul City Arts

Marcus Ryder, Head of External Consultancies, The Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity

Shaista Aziz, Journalist, Comedian, writer and councillor for Oxford city

Salma Bi, BEM, Grass roots cricket champion and coach

Karen Blackett OBE, BEO Trustee

The Rt Hon the Lord Boateng PC DL

Mark Boisson, BEO Trustee

Professor Miranda K. Brawn, visiting Fellow at Oxford University and founder of TMBDLF

Dr. Kevin Brown, UK North Representative, Global Jamaica Diaspora Council (GJDC)

Dawn Butler MP

George Cole, Lord Mayor of Leicester City

Marsha De Cordova MP

Janet Daby MP

Professor Rajinder Dudrah, Birmingham School of Media

Yvonne Field, Founder/CEO The Ubele Initiative

Kulvinder Ghir, Actor

David Harewood, MBE, Actor

Misan Harriman, Chair of Southbank Centre

Lester Holloway, Editor, The Voice

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Sunny Hundal, Journalist

Dame Vivian Hunt DBE, BEO Trustee

Bishop Dr. Desmond Jaddoo, Community Activist

Jonaïd Jilani, Media Manager, Islamic Relief UK

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Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon, OBE

Adrian Lester OBE

Caroline Lucas MP

Jacqueline McKenzie, Partner & Head of Immigration, Leigh Day

Cllr Joe Naitta

Cllr Nathalie Nicholas

Kate Osamor MP

Taiwo Owatemi MP

Marvin J Rees, Mayor of Bristol

Asad Rehman, Director, War on Want

Mandu Reid, **Leader of the Women's Equality Party**

Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP

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Trustees of South Asian Heritage Month/Trust

Claudia Webbe MP

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