

Community Action Against Racism
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December 1, 2011

Sumner M. Redstone, Executive Chairman
CBS Headquarters
51 W. 52nd Street
New York, NY 10019-6188

Dear Mr. Redstone and CBS Leaders:

On October 31, 2011, WCCO, a CBS affiliate in Minnesota, broadcast a story in which its I-TEAM (investigative team) reported about a Minnesota “puppy mill” allegedly sending dogs to a Chinatown meat market in New York City as “meat to eat.” The premise of the story rested on a harmful stereotype of Asian Americans, with the reporter seemingly intent on proving that theory (and his own bias) right and ignoring some basic journalistic principles and ethics. As it turns out, there is no evidence that the Dak Cheong Meat Market sells dog meat, as New York Agriculture Department officials discovered in their investigation of the shop after WCCO aired the inaccurate story.

The National Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA), the Asian American Journalists Association Minnesota chapter, and the Minnesota Pro Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) have written similar letters demanding an explanation. Despite their peers’ strong concerns, WCCO and CBS’ decision has been to remain silent for 23 days about this story after quietly removing it from the WCCO website. The November 23, 2011 “Editor’s Note” is an unsatisfactory written response. While it explained that language may have been a factor in the false reporting, it put the blame on the person interviewed as opposed to the professional reporter. It also fails to acknowledge that the station made a mistake that has damaging ramifications to our community. While the Asian American Journalists Association Minnesota chapter was satisfied with this response, their view is not representative of community members. We deserve a more formal written and on-air apology that includes an explanation of how the biased and inaccurate reporting took place and how it will be prevented from happening again.

We are compelled to also share our concern that the story perpetuated harmful and exaggerated stereotypes of Asians as “dog eaters.” It is appalling that the story filtered through the chain of command and made its way on-air. Responsible reporting and fact checking would have vetted the prejudicial slant and thereby prevented the error.

While we might concede that the mistake stemmed from miscommunication, it does not negate the responsibility of WCCO to confirm the story before airing it and of the station and CBS to respond to the community after the damage was done. Failing to do so undermines your credibility to the community. Worst, the story had negative consequences to the owner of the meat market. In a conversation we had with the meat market, we learned they are fearful of being targeted again based on their culture, ethnicity and language difference.

Community Action Against Racism (CAAR) and the undersigned organizations stand in

solidarity with the 158 community members from around the world who signed online petitions last month demanding a response from WCCO-TV and CBS. We want the following actions to take place to bring retribution to this incident:

1. Provide an on-air apology directly to the public during your 5, 6 and 10 p.m. newscast in which WCCO clearly states:
 - a. A full accounting of what transpired and correction of its facts.
 - b. A sincere acknowledgement of how this incident was harmful to those in the Asian American community because it endorsed stereotypes and contributed to racial discord, when in fact the allegation that the meat market was selling dog meat from animals sent by the dog breeder was false.
 - c. How it will prevent a similar incident from happening again.
2. Address ways to prevent a similar error from occurring again by:
 - a. Evaluating its newsroom diversity and recruiting employees of color who are at the forefront of transmitting news to constituents.
 - b. Providing your journalists with cultural sensitivity and anti-racism training so as to be more sensitive to differences.
 - c. Agreeing to participate in a media panel that would include community members and that would facilitate learning and teaching each other about how to prevent stories like this one from hurting journalists, the journalism field and communities.

We believe this incident speaks to the importance of fair, accurate, and responsible coverage of our communities. It underscores the need for the CBS and WCCO-TV to engage with the public on these matters.

We look forward to your immediate response. You may reach Community Action Against Racism at the address, fax and email above.

Sincerely,

**Community Action Against Racism
Main Street Project
Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans**

**Center for Hmong Arts and Talent
MN APIA
Jewish Community Action**

CC: WCCO, Brien Kennedy, Vice President/General Manager
WCCO, Mike Caputa, News Director
Asian American Journalists Association National
Asian American Journalists Association Minnesota
Minnesota Pro Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists