

Statement from Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association on Ukraine

February 24, 2022



The Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association (AMEJA) Statement in Response to Coverage of the Ukraine

The Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association (AMEJA) calls on all news organizations to be mindful of implicit and explicit bias in their coverage of war in Ukraine. In only the last few days, we have tracked examples of racist news coverage that ascribes more importance to some victims of war over others.

On Feb. 26, during a CBS News segment, correspondent Charlie D'Agata commented: "But this isn't a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan, that has seen conflict raging for decades. This is a relatively civilized, relatively European — I have to choose those words carefully, too — city, one where you wouldn't expect that, or hope that it's going to happen."

Daniel Hannan, of The Telegraph wrote: "They seem so like us. That is what makes it so shocking. War is no longer something visited upon impoverished and remote populations. It can happen to anyone."

Al Jazeera English anchor Peter Dobbie said: "What's compelling is, just looking at them, the way they are dressed, these are prosperous...I'm loath to use the expression... middle class people. These are not obviously refugees looking to get away from areas in the Middle East that are still in a big state of war. These are not people trying to get away from areas in North Africa. They look like any European family that you would live next door to."

"We're not talking here about Syrians fleeing the bombing of the Syrian regime backed by Putin, we're talking about Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours to save their lives." Philippe Corbé, BFM TV, reported.

AMEJA condemns and categorically rejects orientalist and racist implications that any population or country is "uncivilized" or bears economic factors that make it worthy of conflict. This type of commentary reflects the pervasive mentality in Western journalism of normalizing tragedy in parts of the world such as the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. It dehumanizes and

renders their experience with war as somehow normal and expected.

Newsrooms must not make comparisons that weigh the significance or imply justification of one conflict over another — civilian casualties and displacement in other countries are equally as abhorrent as they are in Ukraine.

AMEJA stands in full solidarity with all civilians under military assault in any part of the world, and we deplore the difference in news coverage of people in one country versus another. Not only can such coverage decontextualize conflicts, but it contributes to the erasure of populations around the world who continue to experience violent occupation and aggression.

In order to prevent such explicit bias, we call on newsrooms to train correspondents on the cultural and political nuances of regions they're reporting on, and not rely on American- or Euro-centric biases. Inaccurate and disingenuous comparisons only serve to inflame stereotypes and mislead viewers, and they ultimately perpetuate prejudicial responses to political and humanitarian crises.

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