

David Ensor

From: Richard M. Lobo
Sent: Tuesday, July 31, 2012 2:53 PM
To: BBG Board Group
Cc: David Ensor
Subject: RE: VOA Reporter at UN

Governors,

The agency is about to send materials in response to blogger Matthew Russell Lee's June 24 FOIA request.

Mr. Lee sent a second FOIA request on July 15. We are gathering the relevant materials; please be aware that they can encompass ongoing correspondence about the issues, including e-mails such as this one. We'll let you know when that request has been answered.

We are also in the midst of answering inquiries from a congressional office, which has copied some e-mail exchanges about this matter to a few of you. The issues raised in these exchanges have been clarified with a message to that office; we trust that this has set the matter straight.

In our view, the materials collected under the FOIA process – together with conversations with our colleagues – point to the following facts:

We have come to believe that the VOA request to the UN News & Media Division for a "review of Mr. Lee's status as an accredited UN correspondent" was not appropriate.

The decision to write it was based on a pattern of behavior exhibited by Mr. Lee that VOA United Nations correspondent Margaret Besheer and other journalists viewed as hostile, and that affected the workplace environment. VOA had, and still has, no reason to mistrust the concerns and fears voiced over a number of weeks by Ms. Besheer -- a correspondent with the organization for ten years. VOA has also seen abundant evidence that she was not alone in her concerns.

At no time did Mr. Lee's reporting play a part in VOA's request to the UN. Mr. Lee's behavior was the only factor.

While it was appropriate to contact the UN regarding charges of a hostile work environment on its premises, the request for a "review" of Mr. Lee's credentials was, on due consideration, a disproportionate response to the known facts.

Independent of this episode, the UN News & Media Division undertook its own review of Mr. Lee's status, deciding to sustain his accreditation but warning him that his behavior had been unacceptable.

Dick Lobo and David Ensor