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## APPENDIX

### CBSC Decision 05/06-0383 Comedy Network re *Puppets Who Kill* (“The Island of Skip-Along Pete”)

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#### The Complaint

The following complaint dated September 20, 2005 was sent to the CRTC and forwarded to the CBSC in due course:

Dear Sir or Madam,

Comedy Channel, Friday, 09 September 2005 – *Puppets Who Kill*

I am writing to express my utter shock and disgust at the profanity viewers were subject to on the evening of Friday, 09 September on the Comedy Channel during an airing of *Puppets Who Kill*.

The said profanity was uttered against Christianity’s most sacred person, Jesus Christ, and was so ugly that it grieves me to have to repeat it to advise you of its occurrence.

The words were, “Jesus f\*\*\*\*g Christ”. As well, there were other instances of the name Jesus being used in a deeply disrespectful way. I would like to lodge a formal complaint against the producers of this programme, and the show. While I realize that swearing and profanities have become all too common on our airwaves – and justified as liberty of expression – television programmes need to be held to a standard of community decency. Words can be as powerful as images in conveying hatred or disrespect.

The producers should be held to a standard of decency in speaking of the most sacred persons of any major religion. An attack on one is an attack on us all, whether it is the God of Israel, Allah, Jesus Christ, or others. This is not a matter of liberty of expression: television producers can and do operate without let or hindrance in expressing their views. Where that expression violates community standards and demonstrates deep disrespect, it crosses the line and demands action.

The action in this case ought to be first a public apology to their viewers; and second, that in its regulatory capacity the CRTC hold television producers to account for this by a formal reprimand to the full extent of its powers.

#### Broadcaster’s Response

The broadcaster responded to the complainant on October 26:

The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council has forwarded to us a copy of your letter of September 20, 2005 regarding the program *Puppets Who Kill* which aired on The Comedy Network at 10 p.m., Friday, September 9, 2005.

This program was not meant to be offensive. It is a comedy series and comedy programming can be risky. *Puppets Who Kill* sets out to portray a certain element of society that has no respect for anything, including the law or any moral codes. The series is set in a half-way house, attempting to rehabilitate its inhabitants. In that respect, the characters, who are mostly puppets, speak in much the same way that many members of today's society do. The puppets in this show represent the criminal element and in order to make them real, and to make the comedy work, they need to speak in a manner that we usually associate with criminals or people who have no respect for the mores of society – including religion. The show itself is not promoting hatred or disrespect – it is simply representing some characters found in our everyday lives. Having said that, we also acknowledge that reactions to comedic material are subjective and what one person finds offensive, others do not.

We would like to bring to your attention Clause 2: Human Rights of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' *Code of Ethics* which reads:

*Recognizing that every person has a right to full and equal recognition and to enjoy certain fundamental rights and freedoms, broadcasters shall ensure that their programming contains no abusive or unduly discriminatory material or comment which is based on matters of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status or physical or mental disability.*

We would also bring your attention to CBSC Decision 97/98-0560, July 28, 1998:

*... [T]he CBSC considers that blasphemy alone would not be sufficient to constitute a violation of the CAB Code of Ethics. It would need to be hateful, not merely irreverent, comment, abusively discriminatory, not merely impious or irreligious. At this point in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the CBSC expects that comedians are entitled to question tradition and to tickle formal and possibly outdated values without finding themselves, for that reason alone, exceeding Canadian broadcasting standards.*

It continues:

*There is undeniably a level of irreverence but it is light-hearted, not heavy-handed. It is flippant and casual but not disrespectful.*

We are aware of our responsibility as a broadcaster to adhere to industry codes, and we believe that our service complies with applicable industry codes and guidelines.

Please be assured that it is not our intention to offend our viewers and we are truly sorry that you were offended by the program *Puppets Who Kill*. Thank you for taking the time to express your concern.

The complainant filed her Ruling Request dated November 14.