

MIDDLE EAST REMINDER

Please be careful with Middle East references. Several recent slip-ups have attracted justified complaints.

The ABC follows UN guidelines on proscribed groups and territories. Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad are not included in the UN list of terrorist organisations and therefore must not be described as such.

But if any them of claims responsibility for, say, a suicide bombing or similar outrage, then it is entirely appropriate to name the incident itself as an act of terrorism.

A suicide bomber who detonates himself or herself is a terrorist. While we should avoid labels where possible, do not be afraid to call such a person a terrorist instead of the repetitive use of 'suicide bomber'.

The 'occupied territories', as in the West Bank and Gaza, are not 'Israel's occupied territories'.

There is no contemporary Palestine or a Palestine state at present. There are Palestinian lands and territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

These are under the control of the Palestinian Authority.

It is the Palestinian Prime Minister or the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, but he is not the Prime Minister of Palestine.

If it is necessary to explain Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, you should describe them as 'Israeli settlements declared illegal by the United Nations.'

The term 'Jewish state' as an alternative to Israel is correct inasmuch Israel was founded as a homeland for Jews. But it is misleading as 20% of Israel's population is non-Jewish. It is better to regard the term as a cliché and therefore avoid it.

Avoid referring to the 'Israeli capital' if possible as it is such a contentious issue. Israel says Jerusalem is its capital and is indeed where most of the government offices are situated. But the UN, like most countries, has always regarded Tel Aviv as the capital. Recognising Jerusalem as the capital remains in dispute, partly because Israel annexed the eastern half of the city.

Update 26/2/04: Our generic style for the new dividing line Israel is erecting along the West Bank border is 'security barrier' and thereafter 'barrier' or 'security fence' and thereafter 'fence'. But if the story involves an area where the barrier/fence is actually a wall of concrete blocks, we can refer to it as a 'security wall' and thereafter 'wall'. About one-quarter of the dividing line has been built so far. The majority of it consists of a fence. It is not clear yet what the remaining three-quarters will comprise.

John Tulloh 26.2.04