

Statement of Norman J. Pattiz  
Chairman, Middle East Committee  
Broadcasting Board of Governors  
Before the  
Subcommittee on International Operations and Terrorism  
Committee on Foreign Relations  
April 29, 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I welcome the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss our most recent programs in the Middle East and to give you a quick video glimpse of some of the stories covered by Alhurra as well as the quality of its production.

As Mr. Tomlinson mentioned, Alhurra has been on the air for just over two months. We have plunged into a Middle East media environment that is rich in satellite programming and critical, breaking news. But it is not an environment that is steeped in same traditions of journalism and objective news analysis that we are familiar with. Television and radio broadcasters in the region are, for the most part, government owned, and reflect a particular point of view that can be destructive to opinion about the United States. We hope to make a difference by filling the gap in accurate, objective news coverage.

Before I play the short video clip on Alhurra, I would like to emphasize that the products the BBG has initiated over the past three years were heavily researched before we invested in them. We believe we can be most successful when we tailor our program mix to the audience we are trying to reach, using music and other non-news feature programming when appropriate. We must also broadcast in a manner that is sensitive to the culture and traditions of our audiences. Our formats must be appealing, and our programs compelling and technologically state-of-the-art in order to compete. In the Middle East, while audiences lack objective information about the United States and our leadership in the world, there is no lack of satellite stations that are competing with us for the same audience. We must set ourselves apart, and I believe that Radio Sawa and Alhurra television are doing that.

For the development of Radio Sawa, we traveled to the region and identified a target audience of the large portion of the population that is under the age of 35. We researched what programming would draw them to an AM or FM station, and when we found they would be attracted by modern music, we researched their music preferences. This music-based format, along with features designed to appeal to young audiences, provides the foundation for our news and information programming. So far, it has worked. As Chairman Tomlinson mentioned in his statement, the audience listens, and they listen for the news.

Let me add another survey result to what you have already heard about Sawa listening. In a survey conducted in Morocco – Radio Sawa’s newest market in the Middle East – in February 2004, ACNielsen found that 72 percent of the general population over the age of 15 listened to Radio Sawa. Sawa is even stronger in its 15 to 29 core age group. Among this market segment, Sawa showed a listening rate of 87.5 percent. The rate of listening among audiences over the age of 30 is 63.5 percent, and 77 percent of weekly listeners found Sawa’s news reliable.

The success of Radio Sawa helped fuel the creation of Alhurra, our television broadcast to the Middle East. After funding first became available in April 2003, we assembled a highly skilled team of professionals to take on the daunting task of getting a 24 hour a day station on the air by the beginning of 2004. After months of overcoming the many daily challenges that came our way, we launched the program on February 14. We believe we have a sophisticated product that will compete favorably with the well-established, and well-funded, satellite stations that exist in the region.

The BBG’s use of research also applies to program delivery, which can also pose major diplomatic and engineering challenges. As you know, we are navigating a world where all transmission options are not uniformly available or utilized in every region. Not only do we “marry the mission to the market” when we develop our program content, but we also do so when we choose transmission options. Some markets still require shortwave delivery. Other markets, as in the Middle East and surrounding regions, are much like the U.S. market: they listen to AM and FM radio, and get much of their news from television. Gaining access to AM and FM frequencies requires permission from foreign governments to install or lease transmission within their boundaries. Intense effort from the BBG, together with committed assistance from the State Department, has provided a

network of about 20 AM and FM transmitters from Morocco to Kuwait to support Radio Sawa, and is working to establish terrestrial transmission in Iraq.

I'd now like to play a short video which will give you a clear idea of the substance and flavor of Alhurra.