

From: PANDATA <panda@pandata.org>
Sent: Tuesday, 14 September 2021 23:41
To: George Claassen, News24 Feedback
Subject: News24: Right of Reply

Dear Mr Claassen,

We refer to the following article <https://www.news24.com/news24/columnists/guestcolumn/nathan-geffen-nick-hudson-and-panda-are-wrong-vaccines-are-working-in-sa-heres-the-proof-20210914> which disparages PANDA, including by accusing us of breaking the law by spreading misinformation, and hereby formally request the right of reply.

Kind regards,

PANDA

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PANDA COMMUNICATION TEAM



On 15/09/2021 09:45, George Claassen wrote:

Dear PANDA Communications team

Thank you, noted. Referred to the editors. I'll come back to you as soon as possible. Please note section 7 of the Press Code regarding protected comment.

Kind regards George

George Claassen

Public Editor/Ombudsman News24, The Witness & Media24 Community Press

From: PANDATA panda@pandata.org
Sent: Wednesday, 15 September 2021 20:33
To: George Claassen
Subject: Re: Right of Reply attached

Dear George,

This is the right of reply that we request you to publish with the same prominence as the original article.

Kind regards,
PANDA

PANDA COMMUNICATION TEAM

On 17/09/2021 11:45, George Claassen wrote:

Dear PANDA Communication (please put a name to your complaint)

Thank you. After discussions with the editors, News24 declines to publish your response as it is filled with misinformation and misleading information, not accepted by evidence-based science.

The standard policies of credible news media internationally that giving a right to reply to dubious scientific information and science denialists (and clearly, PANDA's commonly expressed views on various platforms about vaccinations fly in the face of accepted, evidence-based science), is not accepted media ethical practice. The judgment by the Press Council in GroundUp vs Joseph Winer refers. Also the clear expression by the international Organization of Newsombudsmen & Standards Editors in 2019 at its conference in New York that giving the right to reply in science stories *will only be weighed according to accepted evidence-based science* (please see the columns in this regard below).

PANDA and Mr Hudson are clearly advancing and propagating views that are in conflict with accepted, thoroughly weighed evidence-based science, as pointed out by Dr Nathan Geffen in his column in GroundUp, and also published by News24.

News24, therefore, does not see the need to apply the audi alteram partem principle as it should only apply to science stories when the weight of scientific evidence supports your

response. Unfortunately, the misinformation and lack of scientific evidence for the claims you make, do not pass the test for a right to reply in this science story.

Here then, the applicable columns:

<https://www.news24.com/news24/columnists/georgeclaassen/science-denialism-is-a-litmus-test-for-quality-journalism-20190625>

<https://www.news24.com/news24/columnists/georgeclaassen/opinion-press-councils-appeal-decision-a-victory-for-accurate-science-reporting-and-for-countering-quackery-around-covid-19-20200324>

Kind regards George

George Claassen

Public Editor/Ombudsman News24, The Witness & Media24 Community Press

From: PANDATA <panda@pandata.org>

Sent: Tuesday, 21 September 2021 09:48

To: George Claassen

Subject: Re: Right of Reply attached

Dear George,

On 14 September, 2021 you published an opinion piece by Nathan Geffen. Although you now characterise this as a "science story", this is a designation you gave the story only after our complaint. At the time of publication, you clearly

marked the piece "opinion". Opinion journalism makes no claim of objectivity. In fact, this is advocacy journalism. Its purpose is clearly stated in the final paragraph – to motivate people to get vaccinated. It is written by an organisation that is funded by the Open Society Foundations, one of the world's largest investors in vaccines.

That Geffen's piece does not amount to science journalism is also evident from the fact that the only science that Geffen is qualified to comment on is computer science. His statements on COVID-19 do not amount to expert opinion, which was the basis of the decision in the GroundUp and Winer case you reference. You misleadingly refer to Geffen as a "doctor" in your email to us. We understand that he holds a doctorate in mathematics. In short, Geffen's piece is nothing but a personal attack on Nick Hudson and PANDA and it is patent that you are prepared to contort in order to seek to deny PANDA a chance to defend itself.

News24 was no doubt aware, or ought to have been aware, that Geffen had not interviewed PANDA prior to publishing his article. He made no attempt to understand the models or viewpoints that he commented on. We also note that the same piece has been published on at least four different websites suggesting that this is a coordinated attack on PANDA. The Geffen piece contained numerous representations about the stance of Nick Hudson and PANDA on a number of topics relating to COVID-19 and the vaccines that were unreferenced and untrue. These included statements that we have spread misinformation about how deadly COVID-19 is, despite the fact that in our writings PANDA consistently references scientific papers produced by

Stanford University and published by the World Health Organisation ("WHO") on this topic. Geffen stated that PANDA's critique of lockdowns is irrational despite the fact that PANDA's analysis of the impact of lockdowns is set out in several detailed papers on the topic produced by multi-disciplinary teams.

Notably, Geffen made numerous misrepresentations about PANDA's vaccine stance that any decent news source would have fact checked, including a statement that PANDA encourages not getting vaccinated. Given that the spreading of misinformation is a criminal offence in South Africa, Geffen's claims in this regard amount to an accusation of criminal conduct. These are serious allegations made by Geffen and published by News24.

On the other hand, Geffen's article was replete with statements about science that were unreferenced and are untrue and that News24 had no issue publishing. He stated, without any evidence, that the difficulty in ending lockdowns is caused by a failure to wear masks and get vaccinated. He opined that it harms no one to wear a mask, a view that stands in contradiction to the WHO's stance on masks and that flies in the face of occupational health and safety rules the world over. He made an extraordinary claim that more than 200,000 excess deaths in South Africa are "directly due to Covid" even though the government website he references makes it clear that there are insufficient data to draw that conclusion.

In our response, we refuted each statement in detail and, unlike Mr Geffen, referenced the scientific basis for all scientific claims we made. We defended Mr Hudson's

criticism of the Western Cape government propaganda by explaining exactly how the data were lacking and why the conclusions that had been drawn were invalid. Yet you have declined to publish our response on the basis that “it is filled with misinformation and misleading information, not accepted by evidence-based science.”

As an organization comprising dozens of scientists from around the world, PANDA takes evidence-based science very seriously indeed, which is why we always provide links to the underlying science. The argument that you presented to the Press Council relied on the idea that there is discernible scientific consensus in relation to issues that is so incontrovertible that to give equal weight to another view would result in unbalanced reporting. The Press Council relied on a 2012 BMJ editorial that you presented it with. In that article, the author, Trevor Jackson notes that it takes time for scientific consensus to emerge. Given the nature of the scientific process, it is only in rare cases that such consensus exists. It certainly does not exist in the context of COVID-19, which has been with us for only 20 months or in the context of the COVID-19 vaccines, which have only been with us for 10 months.

Moreover, News24 does not have the proficiency to evaluate "the weight of scientific evidence" when PANDA is referencing papers published in scientific journals. When refusing to publish our response, instead of identifying the misinformation you think the response contains, you simply repeat the unsubstantiated allegations made in the original piece, claiming that the "misinformation and lack of scientific evidence for the claims you make do not pass the test for a

right to reply." We think that you are obliged to identify the "science" that makes Geffen's piece a science story, to identify the science in our reply and to identify the weight of scientific evidence. Failing which, you appear to be applying a form of scientism to claim an entitlement to censor whatever you wish to censor.

Since we have, in fact, referenced all the underlying scientific evidence directly in our response, we request that you identify all the specific instances of 'misinformation' and 'misleading information' to which you refer. Broad, unsubstantiated allegations have no place in responsible journalism. As the fourth estate, it is your job to hold government to account, to critically interrogate their propaganda. For you not to take issue with the inclusion of partially vaccinated people amongst the unvaccinated and to silence us for pointing this out shows a disdain for science and a lack of media ethics.

We look forward to your response.

PANDA

PANDA COMMUNICATION TEAM

On 21/09/2021 11:28, George Claassen wrote:

From: George Claassen

Subject: Re: Right of Reply attached

Date: 21 September 2021 at 11:28:42 SAST

To: PANDATA <panda@pandata.org>

Cc: Adriaan, Nathan Geffen, Vanessa Banton

Dear Anonymous (as requested previously, please put an identifiable name to your emails in our communication)

Thank you, the story was clearly an opinion column about a scientific topic, which Covid and the pandemic clearly and uncontested are. As such it, therefore, falls under the Press Code decision by Justice Ngoepe and his appeal panel in the GroundUp vs Joseph Winer case.

News24 and GroundUp will provide you with the requested misinformation and misleading "facts" featured in Mr Hudson's article. It will be sent to you in another email.

Kind regards George

George Claassen

On 23/09/2021 09:53, George Claassen wrote:

From: George Claassen

Subject: Right of reply

Date: 23 September 2021 at 09:53

To: PANDATA, Nathan Geffen, Adriaan Basson, Pieter Du Toit, Sheldon Morais, Vanessa Banton

Dear PANDA

News24 and GroundUp have taken note of your email of 21 September. As you have already published defamatory statements about Dr Geffen in your response in an article in BizNews, we do not see any reason why your response should also be published by News24. News24 cannot republish those defamatory remarks. We adhere and subscribe to the Press Code, BizNews does not.

The story was clearly an opinion column about a scientific topic, which Covid and the pandemic surely and uncontestable are. If you want to lodge a complaint about News24 not publishing your response, please do so at the Press Council. News24 will defend its decision as in line with the appeal judgment of the Press Council in GroundUp versus Joseph Winer (2020), a decision that applies directly to scientific misinformation and the media not being required to follow a false equivalence route merely to apply the audi alteram partem principle in such science cases.

Kind regards George

George Claassen