

Saturday, 18 June 2022

After reviewing the allegations made by Leah Harding, I would like to provide you with the following background and context:

- Leah and I were very good friends for six years, working together on a specific news programme for nearly three of those. Our friendship extended right up until the end of my time at Al Jazeera, and beyond. Outside of work, she knew my family, came to my 40th birthday party, and received hand-made birthday cards from my daughter.
- Colleagues would comment about our on-air rapport, and that the programme was better when we were on together.
- We were always supportive of each other and each other's careers.
- In my farewell video from Al Jazeera, which was viewed collectively by the whole newsroom, Leah said *"Kamahl, I don't have words to say... other than, when I think of the last few years, I'm just so thankful for you. Thank you for being a mentor to me, for being a friend... I'll miss that so much, and I'll miss you, and thank you... thank you... <blows kiss>"*
- In a series of Instagram Stories, Leah documented my final day at Al Jazeera from her Instagram account, referring to me as *"my TV best friend"*, *"one of my best friends in real life"*, and said she was *"trying to keep it together, because I just can't imagine working here without him"*. At the end she said she was *"drinking my feelings cos it's so sad... no more Kamahl."*
- In an Instagram post (since deleted) on my final day at Al Jazeera, Leah referred to me as her *"TV husband"*, *"mentor"*, and signed the post *"love ya always, friend."* There are also numerous tweets from her in the years preceding, indicating our friendship, some tagged with #bestie.

These videos and social media posts (over a number of years) need to be viewed in their totality.

All of this points to two people who were **mutual** friends, as well as colleagues, and who shared a rapport together – unlike Leah's allegations which are decidedly one-sided and lacking context. There is ample proof of our mutual friendship.

With regards to the allegations raised:

- My friendship with Leah was characterised by a lot of fun, banter, and joking, but all based on longstanding familiarity. It was not one-sided.
- “That’s what she said” is a double-entendre joke made popular in the U.S. TV version of *The Office*. It was something said by a number of people in the newsroom, including women. The reference to “I’ve got to stop this” is to say that not everyone may get this type of humour.
- The keychain was a reference to an in-joke about HER awkwardness, not any seduction by anyone.
- The letter to her parents was private correspondence. They had wanted to meet me for coffee when they were in Doha, but I didn’t have the time, so I wrote them a letter praising Leah and the way they had brought her up. It also included references to her being “the little sister I never had” and “the colleague I always wanted”. As it happens, I did end up meeting them in person when they visited the newsroom in Doha, and her mother later sent me a note of thanks in return.
 - The text messages supplied show only one side of a conversation between friends.

Commenting on outfits or “super-long awkward hugs” was part of our everyday chat. • As good friends, we would share personal and intimate stories, and I never believed Leah found them to be offensive. There was one intimate story I told her which she would actually reference and joke about herself on occasions, apropos of nothing.

With regards to your questions about my time at TVNZ and at Al Jazeera:

- For legal reasons, I am unable to comment on questions relating to private employment matters.

There is, however, an assumption in these allegations, and in previous ones, that I as a news presenter at Al Jazeera had a lot of power and influence. That may be the case in other newsrooms, but at Al Jazeera English this is categorically not the case. On-air presenters are effectively treated as an autocue-reader, regardless of experience, ability, etc.

I would have absolutely no input/influence over **anyone’s** career prospects. I would also point out that Leah spoke to me about her experiences of inappropriate behaviour/comments from at least three male newsroom colleagues.

Kamahl Santamaria.