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The decision by the Arab satellite channel Aljazeera not to broadcast video recorded by the gunman in Toulouse as he killed seven people is a victory for newsroom ethics and should encourage fresh debate in Britain and elsewhere about broadcasting standards and coverage of terrorism.

According to reports Aljazeera is the only channel to receive video material which shows the attacks carried out by Toulouse gunman Mohamed Merah who filmed himself killing seven people, including Jewish children and unarmed soldiers, before he was shot dead after a 32-hour siege last week.

In a statement Aljazeera said it was not responding to pressure from French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who has called on them not to show the video. The network said: "In accordance with al-Jazeera's code of ethics, given the video does not add any information that is not already in

the public domain, its news channels will not be broadcasting any of its contents."

The channel said it had rejected numerous requests from media outlets for copies of the video which, according to the network's Paris bureau chief Zied Tarrouche, had been re-edited and mixed with music and recitals of Koranic verse and in which "you also hear the victims' cries."

The video captured a ruthlessness that shocked even hardened journalists. As the police surrounded him during the 30-hour siege of his apartment Merah boasted to the authorities that his grisly recordings would soon be seen by the public.

However, Aljazeera's decision shows a degree of journalistic restraint and application of journalistic principles common to all news organisations, although many media have not shied away in the past from showing distressing film of hostages, typically blindfolded with armed gunmen in the background, in videos released by terrorists and others.

The question of whether such images add substantially to the story being told or whether they unduly add to the distress of the families, friends and colleagues of the victims is an area of tricky editorial judgement.

Aljazeera's decision to stand up for ethical journalism is welcome, not least because many have criticised the channel's vivid and explicit coverage of Middle East violence and use of video supplied by terrorist groups.