

NSS criticises BBC video promoting Operation Christmas Child

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The National Secular Society has said the BBC "allowed itself to be used" to promote "propaganda for fundamentalist Christianity" in producing a video on the Operation Christmas Child shoebox scheme.

The NSS has written to the corporation's complaints department about a video entitled [Christmas boxes sent to children 'who have never had presents'](#), released on Thursday on the BBC website.

The video shows footage from an Operation Christmas Child base in the West Midlands and children receiving shoeboxes. It also features a voiceover from a representative of Operation Christmas Child, who is the only person who speaks in the video.

The video features no critical analysis of the motives behind the scheme or its impact.

Criticisms of Operation Christmas Child

Operation Christmas Child sees donors fill shoeboxes with toys, which are then sent to children in developing countries at Christmas.

It has been criticised for pressurising children and families in relatively poor countries, often with large Muslim populations, to convert to fundamentalist Christianity.

Operation Christmas Child's website, which [talks](#) of inviting children "into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ", makes clear that it aims to convert children.

The scheme has also been criticised for causing unnecessary environmental damage, being ineffective and harming local economies.

It is run by the evangelical Christian charity [Samaritan's Purse](#), whose president has praised Vladimir Putin's anti-gay laws, said Muslims "should be barred from immigrating to America", and called on Christians to convert Muslims.

Aid agencies including Oxfam and Save the Children have [distanced](#) themselves from Operation Christmas Child in recent years.

NSS writes to the BBC

The NSS's letter to the BBC said the video had breached at least 11 clauses on impartiality under section 4 of the corporation's editorial [guidelines](#).

The NSS wrote: "It is deeply disappointing that the BBC has allowed itself to be used as propaganda for fundamentalist Christianity by effectively running an advert for Operation Christmas Child on its website."

The society said in future the BBC should not "allow itself to contribute to exploitative and unethical charity schemes". It added that the BBC should conduct "thorough research" and "ensure controversies are objectively and critically examined rather than ignored".

Explaining the letter, NSS spokesperson Megan Manson said: "The BBC should have been aware of reasonable and widely-shared concerns about Operation Christmas Child – in particular that it acts as a vehicle for pushing fundamentalist religion on children.

"Criticisms of Operation Christmas Child are easy to find and the BBC should have spotted them and engaged with them before producing this bit of propaganda.

"As the national broadcaster the BBC has a duty of impartiality and should report on religious organisations in a balanced and objective manner. We hope it will reflect on the inappropriateness of this video to ensure this doesn't happen again."

BBC updates video description after NSS criticism

The BBC updated the text description which accompanied the video on Thursday, adding the line: "Some, including humanist organisations, have criticised the aid group for distributing evangelical messages."

The update came shortly after the NSS [criticised](#) the video as "effectively an advert for Operation Christmas Child" on Twitter.

Before the update, the accompanying text contained no suggestion that the scheme was controversial.

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