



Case Report

1	Case Number	0193/11
2	Advertiser	My Peace
3	Product	Community Awareness
4	Type of Advertisement / media	Transport
5	Date of Determination	22/06/2011
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Religion

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

Wording displayed on Buses which reads, "Jesus - A prophet of Islam".

THE COMPLAINT

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

Australia is a Christian country - how can we allow such advertising to take place in our most wonderful home by a minority of unassimilated, confrontational fundamentalists wanting to introduce Sharia law here and destroy our quality of life?

I as a Christian find this an outrageous lie and well as an insult to Christianity.... Jesus was the Son of God, not a prophet of Islam, and to say it is, is blasphemy...

We are a Christian nation and this disgusting ad only shows how Islam seems to be taking over.

Because it's not the truth or fact. Full stop.

Also Australia was built by Christian people whom sacrifice their bloods for our Christian community also Is the Government aware that Mohammed the founder of the Muslim religion was born 700 years after Jesus Christ so Jesus Christ could not be a prophet of Islam!!!

Thank you for your consideration for the sake of our kids' future and the peace of Australia and the whole world.

I am so deeply offended by this advertisement. I am a Christian and respect other religions but this is directly offending the Lord I worship. They can advertise for their religion but I

don't want them to attack mine in the process. To say such controversial and inflammatory statements is dangerous to say the least? Consider how they react to a cartoon of Mohammed. Please please stop this campaign or get them to remove the name of our principle focus in our religion. I don't mind the other signs seen on their websites but any mention of the name of my Lord MUST be removed from their slander. Please consider this as a complaint from a reasoning person not the words of an angry or disgruntled fanatic. I just don't wish to be offended and slapped in the face whenever a bus drives past.

What would the Dept. of Immigration do to stop or minimize the migration of the Islamist who most of them are Terrorist and extremist who just plan to destroy the Harmony of the Australian community and plan further plans against the Christian majority in Australia while they are supposed to respect the Religion, belief and ethics of the country that they migrate to. If they don't let them stay away.

THIS IS A VERY SERIOUS MATTER AND INCIDENT THAT HAS TO BE STOPPED IMMEDIATELY AT ANY COST BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.

I am a believer of the Catholic faith and as a Catholic I believe it is morally wrong to allow another faith to undermine the core belief of my religion. I also personally believe the advertisements are misleading to the younger generation of Australian people. This is a Christian country and should not allow this.

The information on this advertisement is false seeing as Mohammed the founder of the Muslim religion was born 700 years AFTER Jesus Christ so Jesus Christ could not be a prophet of Islam.

In our defence we (Catholics) do not push our faith on others nor do we undermine the faith of others whether they be Muslims atheists or Buddhists.

I fear that the more people exposed to it the more will believe it and I do not agree that we should allow Australia to be exposed or progress to become an Islamic country.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complainant/s regarding this advertisement include the following:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the complaints.

The complaints mostly relate to the advertisement "Jesus - a Prophet of Islam.", whilst a small number of them also relate to the other advertisement with the message, "Abraham. Noah. Moses. Jesus and Muhammad – Prophets of ... Islam." These advancements are displayed on two billboards in Sydney as well as on a number of public buses, bus shelters and websites.

I strongly believe that the advertisements do not breach section 2 of the Australian Association of National Advertisers Code of Ethics. They do not "portray people or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of ... religion." To the contrary, it was our intention that these advertisements would help reduce discrimination and vilification against certain sections of the Australian community, and in particular Muslims.

Unfortunately the experiences of Muslims living in Australia have not always been positive, and in this regard, I would like to draw your attention to a report, "Isma – Listen: National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians" published by

the Australian Human Rights Commission. In that report, the Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner, Dr William Jonas AM, summarised the experiences of over 1400 Arab and Muslim Australians who were consulted as part of that project in the following words: What we heard was often disturbing. Participants identifiable as Arab or Muslim by their dress, language, name or appearance told of having been abused, threatened, spat on, assailed with eggs, bottles, cans and rocks, punched and even bitten. Drivers have been run off the road and pedestrians run down on footpaths and in car parks. People reported being fired from their jobs or refused employment or promotion because of their race or religion. Children have been bullied in school yards. Women have been stalked, abused and assaulted in shopping centres. Private homes, places of worship and schools were vandalised and burned. 'Terrorist' 'Dirty Arab' 'Murderer' 'Bloody Muslim' 'Raghead' 'Bin-Laden' 'Illegal immigrant' 'Black c..t' are just some of the labels and profanities that we were told have been used against Arabs and Muslims in public places. Arab and Muslim Australians were told to 'Go back to your own country', even those whose families have been in Australia for many generations. Perhaps more troubling than the nature and intensity of discrimination and vilification is the impact such incidents had on participants. Many Arab and Muslim Australians said they were feeling isolated and fearful. 'I don't feel like I belong here anymore' was a common sentiment.

Yet not all participants experienced discrimination or vilification and those who did often qualified their comments by explaining that in the majority of circumstances, they were treated with respect. As one participant explained, 'Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of good people out there, but there are these very few people that are making a bad impact on a lot of us.' For most Arab and Muslim Australians, discrimination and abuse is not an everyday occurrence. However, when it does happen, it leaves a lasting impression that contributes to a sense of alienation, distrust and fear of future discrimination and attacks. ... Arab and Muslim Australians have not been passive 'victims' of discrimination - they have challenged negative stereotypes and misinformation about their communities in a range of positive and creative ways. Governments too have sought to quell the worst manifestations of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination. Nevertheless, there is still work to be done.

It is disheartening to know that some of the complainants to the ASB used labels such as "malicious cult""to describe Islam and the Muslims have been variously described by them as "a minority of unassimilated, confrontational fundamentalist"" and ""most of them are terrorist and extremist who just plan to destroy the harmony of the Australian community." It was these misunderstandings about Islam and Muslims amongst a small section of the Australian community which led us to put up the advertisements. The aim of the advertisements was to create a better understanding of Islam, to create tolerance towards Muslims and to educate people on what Islam and Muslims are. It was our way of challenging negative stereotyping and misinformation about Islam and Muslims. It was never our intention to cause any offence to any members of the community by claiming Jesus as a prophet of Islam.

As many people may not be aware, in Islam, Jesus is considered to be a Messenger of God and the Messiah who was sent to guide the Children of Israel with a new scripture, the Gospel [The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, p.158]. The Qu'ran mentions Jesus many times [for example, in "Jesus, Son of Mary" in Oxford Islamic Studies Online says that Jesus is mentioned 25 times in the Qu'ran]. It states that Jesus was born to Mary as the result of virginal conception, a miraculous event which occurred by the decree of God. Like Christians, Muslims also believe that Jesus will return to earth near the Day of Judgment to restore justice and to defeat Masih ad-Dajjal, also known as the Antichrist.

The advertisements do not in any way challenge any of the beliefs in the Christian or other faith. Instead it highlights the commonality of Islam and other mono-theistic religions, such as Judaism and Christianity. It conveys the message that, like Christians, we, the Muslims also regard Jesus with extreme reverence. It also conveys the message that, like Jews and Christians, we also regard Abraham, Noah and Moses with reverence. The idea being that the people will see beyond the words in the advertisements and recognise that Islam and Muslims are not much different from any other ordinary Australian. It should be noted that there have been overwhelming positive response to these advertisements, and we have received hundreds of supportive e-mails from members of the wider community. There are also many Ministers from various Churches who have called us in support of the advertisements and the positive impact they will have in promoting tolerance and acceptability of cultural and religious diversity amongst Australians.

THE DETERMINATION

The Advertising Standards Board (“Board”) considered whether this advertisement breaches section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (the “Code”).

The Board noted complainants’ concerns that the advertisement vilifies the Christian faith by associating Jesus with Islam, is insulting to people holding the religious belief that Jesus is the son of God, and gives a false and alarming impression to children.

The Board considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.1 of the Code. Section 2.1 of the Code states: “Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not portray people or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability or political belief.”

The Board noted that the advertisement contains a statement about the beliefs of Islam. The Board acknowledged that the Islam faith does consider that Jesus is a prophet of Mohammed.

The Board agreed that some members of the community would be offended or upset by the statement as it is a statement that would be inconsistent with Christian beliefs.

The Board noted that any religion has the right to advertise its beliefs provided that such advertisements do not discriminate against or vilify people in the community on account of their religion.

The Board considered that a statement about the beliefs of a faith or religion may be offensive to people who do not hold those beliefs but that such a statement does not, of itself, discriminate against or vilify people who hold different beliefs.

Considering the particular wording of this advertisement, the Board considered that the statement is a reflection of a belief of followers of Islam and that the statement is presented in a manner that does not discriminate against or vilify Christians.

The Board determined that the material depicted did not discriminate against or vilify any person or section of the community on account of religion and did not breach section 2.1 of the Code.

The Board noted complainant concerns that the advertisement would confuse children and may be frightening to children. The Board considered that the advertisement does not contain frightening material and that it is not unreasonable for children to be exposed to a variety of information in their daily lives some of which may conflict with the views with which they are raised. The Board considered that exposure to material which may conflict with a person's own views is not a breach of the Code and in the present case the billboards do not suggest violence.

Further finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on any other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaint.