



Bringing hearts and minds  
together for children

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## Plan International Finland's reply to SahWira Africa International

**SahWira Africa International strongly criticises Plan International Finland's campaign "Maternity wear for a 12-year old". This is our reply to the organisation's petition on May 7, 2018.**

The "Maternity Wear for a 12-Year-Old" campaign sought to draw attention to a serious and difficult global issue: child and teen pregnancies.

The campaign was designed by an international team. Plan's Zambian experts were deeply involved in the process as was the campaign's principal character, Fridah, as well as her family and community. From the beginning, they had accurate information about where the photos would be used and of the texts involved. Our partners Meeri Koutaniemi, Paola Suhonen and hasan & partners were involved in realising the campaign as artists and marketing professionals, not as aid workers.

Fridah and her family did not receive any monetary compensation for being a part of the campaign, since they live in a community supported by Plan. According to our ethical principles, we always focus our support on the entire community instead of treating individuals economically unequally. Fridah and her child have received support from Plan during her pregnancy as well as after it, and we will support her return to school.

The campaign's imagery also included a dual message: criticism of the imagery used in Western advertisements that emphasises the promotion of consumption. Difficult social issues will not be solved by launching new clothing lines, for instance. It will take a deep change to societal structures and support for the communities taking this change forward. That is why programme work in Plan's operating countries is carried out by local employees, volunteers and communities with starting points that they themselves can define—and not "white saviours" as the petition implies.

Having examined the campaign, we have come to the conclusion that we could have given an even stronger emphasis to the criticism of Western advertisement imagery included in our marketing communications. We did not succeed in the best possible way there and we apologise for that. It is obvious that these kinds of shocking pictures can also cause anger when taken out of their context.

National Organisations: Australia Belgium Canada Colombia Denmark Finland France Germany Hong Kong India Ireland Japan Korea Netherlands Norway Spain Sweden Switzerland United Kingdom United States

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We also admit that the campaign's making-of videos unintentionally emphasised the white saviour setting and didn't provide Fridah with the active role she had in the literary campaign material. We decided to remove the videos from circulation on the basis of feedback received.

We do, however, completely deny the petition's claim that our campaign was racist and sexist and that it sexualised children or strengthened stereotypes of African girls as prostitutes and men as potential rapists. We also deny the claim that our campaign was based on the impression of Africa as a dark and uncivilised continent. These claims are not only untrue but are also offensive to all communities, employees and volunteers working with Plan around the world and here in Finland.

Fridah was not chosen to figurehead the campaign due to her skin colour or ethnicity. We surveyed photoshooting possibilities in Plan International's operating countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America where teenage motherhood is a serious problem. The campaign was in the end done in Zambia, where approximately one in three girls under the age of 18 becomes a mother. Fridah is not a victim and we have not portrayed her as such. By including a real pregnant child in the campaign, we were able to communicate that teenage motherhood does not have to mean that the mother cannot finish school, but that with the community's support, the girl can pursue for her own goals.

The petition claims that the campaign raised €56.6m, with 40% from monthly donors. €56.6m was the mathematical value of the campaign's media visibility, not its profit. During the campaign, the number of monthly donors increased by 40% compared to the previous year.

Plan is a religiously and politically independent organisation with strong values and a very strict set of principles, as well as child protection guidelines that we follow and evaluate regularly. The campaign under discussion was also carried out on this basis.

It is obvious that when a social issue is brought to light using marketing communications, there will be discussion and also criticism. We respect all opinions and we are always ready to discuss our choices and the content of our advertisements. We have been in touch with critics to gain in-depth feedback and to discuss the theme.

However, we will not now nor in the future apologise for carrying out our basic mission, which also includes the campaign under discussion. Plan's mission is to draw attention to difficult topics and to change this attention into support for the actions that communities in our programme countries are carrying out every day. We cannot afford to remain silent. If we do not get results, we will ultimately pass the buck to those we are trying to help—the most excluded girls.



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