

Reverend Paul Nicholson
Taxpayers Against Poverty

By e-mail only



Charity Commission
PO Box 1227
Liverpool, L69 3UG

t: 0300 065 1876

Your Ref:

Our Ref:

Date: 10 April 2015

Dear Reverend Paul Nicholson

Complaint to Charity Commission

I refer to your e-mails to William Shawcross of 31 March and 2 April, who has asked me to respond, in connection with the Commission's report regarding Oxfam's Perfect Storm tweet.

The Commission has not sought to limit the freedom of charities to campaign or prevent them from providing factual information about poverty in Britain today and does not consider that its report has this effect. The Commission acknowledges that charities have an important role to play in the public debate on poverty in the UK and make a significant contribution to this. Therefore charities (including Oxfam) can continue to undertake campaigning and political activity to highlight the effects of poverty in the UK – providing they have reasonable expectation that doing so will advance their charitable purposes and that they act within the legal framework for charities having regard to charity and electoral law, including the Lobbying Act 2014.

It is a fundamental principle that a charity must remain independent and not align itself with a particular political party. Whilst it can support or oppose particular policies (including those advocated by a particular party), it must never support or oppose a political party.

The 'perfect storm' tweet, to which you refer, was tweeted by Oxfam in June 2014. The Commission received complaints about it and was concerned as to whether it sought to influence

On track to meet your deadline?

Visit www.charitycommission.gov.uk for help on filing your annual return and accounts

General Enquiries: 0300 066 9197

Textphone: 0300 066 9219

Website: www.charitycommission.gov.uk

public opinion in a party political sense. As you know from our Operational Case Report from which you have quoted, we considered that the tweet could have affected the views of those who received it and could have been misconstrued by some as party political campaigning. This was to do with the nature and content of the tweet (which took the form of a mock cinema advertisement) and not because it related to UK poverty. If the tweet had contained factually accurate information about poverty in the UK or had referred to the 'Below the Breadline' report it was meant to highlight, it is unlikely that there would have been a problem.

In the run up to this May's elections, charities that are engaging in political activity or campaigning must ensure that they comply with the Lobbying Act 2014 and take special care to ensure that they are, and are seen to be, independent of any political party. They can continue to campaign, as long as they make it clear that they are independent from any political party advocating the same policies, and do nothing to encourage support for any political party.

The Commission has produced guidance to assist charities in effectively using their voice within the confines of the law. In doing so, it respects the right of freedom of speech.

I hope that this reassures you.

Yours sincerely

Neil Robertson
Head of Operations, Taunton
operationstaunton@charitycommission.gsi.gov.uk