

Leading Leprosy organisation fires back at prejudicial Pirates

Submitted by: The Leprosy Mission England and Wales

Tuesday, 17 January 2012

A prominent leprosy charity has spoken out against the trailer for a new animated film that portrays those affected by the disease for humorous effect.

The trailer promoting Aardman's 'The Pirates! – In An Adventure With Scientists' (<http://thepirates-movie.com/>), which is due for release in March this year, combines an astonishing insensitivity with a lack of awareness of disability issues when it shows an arm falling off a character on a so-called 'leper boat'.

In the scene, the 'Pirate Captain', voiced by Hugh Grant, arrives on the ship demanding gold. He is told by a crewmember that there is none on board because "this is a leper boat", at which point the man's arm falls off. This is, of course, meant to be comical.

Since 1874, the Leprosy Mission England and Wales (<http://www.leprosymission.org.uk>) (TLMEW) has been working to eliminate the causes and consequences of leprosy. The disabilities it can cause currently affect around three million people worldwide, and over 200,000 new cases were diagnosed in 2010. An important part of The Leprosy Mission's work today is to educate to ensure that the word leper is not used in public life or condoned by media channels.

Says Peter Walker, National Director of TLMEW, "The word leper is derogatory, outdated, and is associated with someone who has been rejected, ostracised or regarded as an outcast.

"People affected by leprosy have asked that the word no longer be used. It is an offensive term that has historically been used to justify appalling treatment and the passing of stigmatizing legislation.

"I find myself at a total loss as to why a modern filmmaker should find it acceptable to portray a disease associated with discrimination and loss as something humorous. They have also ensured that facts do not get in the way of their story by portraying a totally erroneous aspect of leprosy – the misnomer that body parts fall off those affected – despite the wealth of educational information coming from TLMEW and other leprosy organisations.

"Every two minutes, a person, possibly a child, is diagnosed with leprosy. They will be scared of the disease and the terrible discrimination it will probably bring and they will invariably be one of the poorest of the poor."

He continues: "They will face the triple whammy of disease, disability and discrimination within their own societies. Now, thanks to Aardman they will face the added humiliation of being seen as a soft target for half-witted humour. It is dire and discriminatory".

The Leprosy Mission is calling for the scene to be removed from the film, as well as for an apology to be issued by those involved in its production.

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