

THE RUTHERFORD INSTITUTE

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INTERNATIONAL OFFICE
CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE
Budapest, Hungary

November 15, 2006

Matthew T. Cooper, President & CEO
Marine Toys for Tots Foundation
715 Broadway Street
MCA Annex, Suite 300
Quantico, Virginia 22134

Re: Refusal of Jesus Dolls Donation

Dear Mr. Cooper:

As president of The Rutherford Institute, a civil liberties organization dedicated to the defense of constitutional freedoms, I am troubled by the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation's refusal to accept a donation of 4,000 talking Jesus dolls from the toy company one2believe. This appears to contradict Marine Toys for Tots' mission of ensuring that needy children are able to experience the joy of Christmas through donated gifts. It also seems to indicate a desire on the part of the Foundation to suppress the religious message that is the very foundation of the Christmas season.

The decision to refuse the generous donation of one2believe undermines the goals of the program and the Foundation. The stated mission of the Foundation is "to assist the U.S. Marine Corps in providing a tangible sign of hope to economically disadvantaged children at Christmas" and "to call the general public to action in support of this patriotic community action program." The mission of the Marine Corps Toys for Tots program is "to collect new, unwrapped toys during October, November and December each year, and distribute those toys as Christmas gifts to needy children in the community in which the campaign is conducted."

Public statements by representatives of the Foundation suggest that refusal of the Jesus dolls was motivated by a concern that the dolls might offend Jewish or Muslim recipients. However, there is little reason to fear that children or their families will be offended by a gift of the Jesus doll. As your own materials state, the gifts are unwrapped so any child or parent who does not want to receive the doll need only decline that gift and receive something else. It seems irresponsible to reject a substantial gift that will bring joy and hope to thousands of children when any risk of offense is highly unlikely and easily preventable.

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The refusal of the Jesus dolls also sends a sinister message that gifts with religious themes or messages are not suitable or are considered second-class by a prominent charity that is intimately associated with the United States government. Christmas is, after all, a holiday with a religious basis, and the birth of Jesus is the basis of the celebration for the vast majority of Americans. Those who wish to express that aspect of the Christmas season through their giving should not be turned away and discriminated against because of their religious beliefs. To do so sends a message to people of faith that they are no longer welcome by the government and its partners to participate in the celebration of the Christmas season. Public support for the program will certainly suffer because the rejection of the donation demonstrates that some public gifts to the program are not worthy.

The rejection of the Jesus dolls is another example of the trend to secularize the Christmas holiday and expunge all religious meaning from it. Secularization robs the season of an important, if not essential, facet of the Christmas holiday and deprives the public of the spirituality they yearn to find in celebrating Christmas.

We can think of no better gift in furtherance of your stated missions during this holiday season than a doll representing the person whose birth is the very reason for the celebration and whose life embodied the spirit of giving and compassion that are the inspiration for the Toys for Tots program.

For the sake of the thousands of needy children who are given hope by this program and inspired by the act of generosity of the Marine Corps, we urge you to accept the generous donation of the Jesus dolls that has been offered to Toys for Tots and the Foundation.

Sincerely yours,



John W. Whitehead

cc: Lt. General John W. Bergman, Commander
Marine Forces Reserves

Michael La Roe, Director of Business Development
Beverly Hills Teddy Bear Co.