



Mr. Hubert Sauper
c/o Mille et Une Productions
48, rue de Paradis 75010 Paris
France

8 December 2005

Dear Mr. Sauper,

We send our congratulations from the Lake Victoria region on the success of *Darwin's Nightmare*, as demonstrated by the sixteen awards it has received over the past year. We apologize for the belated arrival of this letter, but, unfortunately, the film is not available in Eastern Africa and it has taken us some effort to track it down.

At the same time, we take the opportunity to correct several serious misconceptions that your film promotes.

First, what you have titled as the "IUCN Ecological Congress" was in fact the "International Workshop on Community Participation in Fisheries Management on Lake Victoria", organized jointly by the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization and The World Conservation Union (IUCN).

Had you stayed in the workshop for more than 15 minutes, you would have realized that the workshop was in fact defining ways to devolve some of the responsibilities and rewards of fisheries management to local communities. While community empowerment does not translate into poverty alleviation overnight, it is a critical initial step to improve the lives of communities. The government ministers, scientists, industry and community representatives at that meeting would have gladly informed you about the purpose of the workshop, and their view of the impact of the Lake Victoria fisheries on fishing communities in Tanzania, had you asked.

Second, your documentary leads audiences to believe that the export of fish to Europe creates poverty in Tanzania; a conclusion that is made especially shocking by including reports of famine in Tanzania at the time. While some earlier studies supported this view, economic and social realities are infinitely more complex and more recent studies (LVFRP 1999; LVEMP 2001; Ikwaput in press) argue the contrary, namely that the fisheries have increased food security

and reduced poverty. Experts could have conveyed this scientific understanding, which would have allowed you to portray a more balanced story to European viewers about the impacts of the fisheries.

In fact, in 1999-2000 there was a ban on exports to the European Union, which according to your story should have led to much more food and prosperity for the local community. However, the ban was not well received by local fishers and the wider population. Nile perch is not very popular with local consumers, and moreover, local communities had come to depend on the social and economic gains that the export provides. The loss of the export market caused significant unemployment, loss of income, and misery at the local level.

Third, while every person on this planet has the right to tell their story, we wonder whether the night watchman of the Fisheries Research Institute that you use as a major source of information and analysis throughout the film is the appropriate person to assess the impact of international trade and fisheries on local communities. Next time, instead of interviewing the night watchman, we invite you to visit the research institute during the day so that the staff inside can help to answer some of your questions.

Fourth, your documentary leads viewers to the conclusion that there is a close connection between the export of fish to Europe and the import of weapons to Africa, or, in other words, that Europe perpetuates war to strip Africa of its fish and other resources. The sources you use as proof – one Russian navigator with limited capacities in English, one young artist and one journalist – do not suffice. But instead of suggesting that planes *might* carry in weapons and fly out fish, you present it as an inevitable conclusion for every flight.

Fifth, you suggest that poverty, prostitution, AIDS and homelessness are a direct consequence of the fisheries export. It would seem obvious to most people that such tragedies are found in most places on this planet, including in the cities of Europe, and are rarely if ever connected to any particular industry.

Sixth, your story does not show the many fishing communities around the Lake who have seen their lives improve because of the fisheries and exports. The great majority of fishing communities are far better off than the ones you depict. By focusing on a small group – while we agree that the conditions they live in are appalling and unacceptable – you close the eyes of Europeans to the many benefits that the Lake Victoria fishery has brought to hundreds of thousands of people, and the progress that has been made in fighting poverty in the region.

Seventh, and finally, we are puzzled why you have chosen to speak to only six European researchers as research advisers, rather than to any one of the hundreds of African representatives from government, research institutes and communities who are involved in fisheries management, research and community development around the lake.

For the above reasons, we come to no other conclusion than that you specifically selected advisors and subjects who allowed you to ignore the positive impacts of the Lake Victoria fisheries, and to lead audiences to believe the false conclusion that the export of fish creates poverty. The establishment of such an image in the media and minds of consumers of Europe may endanger the very export on which the people around the lake depend.

Given that dependence, we strongly feel that any coverage of the fisheries has the responsibility to report in a balanced and fair manner, and show both the positive and negative sides of this industry. In light of the corrections outlined above, *Darwin's Nightmare* unfortunately does not meet the criteria for good journalism, but instead tells a sensational story for good film sales.

Moreover, you focus on poverty and misery, and ignore the efforts and successes of millions of Africans, supported by governments and individuals in Europe, to rid Africa of poverty. There is significant progress to be reported, but, again, you chose to show only part of the story. You seem intent to confirm the stereotypical image of Europe towards Africa: despite decades of investment in development aid, Africa is still an uncivilized and lawless place where the white man takes and the black man and woman suffer.

We sympathize with your motivation to show the flaws of "*the globalization of African markets*" in *Darwin's Nightmare*. But, contrary to your portrayal, the fisheries of Lake Victoria are far from an example of the "*deadliest humiliation for the people of this continent*". The conclusions of *Darwin's Nightmare* are themselves as corrupt as you accuse the fisheries of Lake Victoria to be.

By painting a dark picture of the Lake Victoria fisheries, rather than providing a balanced view that shows the positive and negative sides, we are tempted to conclude that you yourself exploit the misery of the people of Lake Victoria in your documentary, and capitalize on a false image of Africa.

Sincerely,



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