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Hindu Awareness Association of North America
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Dear Mr. Lal:

On behalf of the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT), we would like to apologize for the inappropriate use of Hindu religious imagery at Fashion Cares this past month. We are deeply sorry for the offense we have caused.

The Bollywood Cowboy theme was chosen as a way to explore the intersection of two very popular cinematic genres, Bollywood and Hollywood westerns. In no way was it ever meant to represent the very rich, and very complex, cultures and traditions of South Asia. That said, our use of Hindu religious imagery was clearly a mistake.

After hearing concerns in the weeks leading up to the event, we stopped using an image inspired by the goddess Lakshmi in our external marketing materials, but we take full responsibility for the decision to use the image in the first place, and for failing to stop its use on the cover of the event program distributed to gala patrons.

We did not sanction the appearance of people dressed as Hindu gods and goddesses at the event nor the handing out of flyers depicting religious icons. While these were the actions of individuals attending the event, we take full responsibility for failing to identify them in time to take the appropriate action.

As such, we have issued our statement of apology to the editors of the Toronto Star and a number of South Asian community publications. Our board members have also expressed our apology on Global and Ormi Television.

ACT works to prevent the spread of HIV and support those living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. To accomplish this goal, we build relationships with the many communities affected by HIV/AIDS and we count the city's South Asian communities among those with whom we must work closely in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,

John Lavis,
Chair, ACT Board of Directors

Lori Lucier,
Executive Director, ACT

member of the Canadian AIDS Society and the Ontario AIDS Network and their associated members.