

# APAMC

Asian Pacific American Media Coalition

August 4, 2014

Jeff Cusson  
Senior Vice President, Corporate Affairs, HBO  
Via email to [Jeff.Cusson@hbo.com](mailto:Jeff.Cusson@hbo.com)

Re: "Jonah from Tonga"

Dear Mr. Cusson:

The Asian Pacific American Media Coalition, NAACP, National Hispanic Media Coalition, American Indians in Film/TV, and Empowering Pacific Islander Communities write to express our deep concern over HBO's announced new series, "Jonah from Tonga."

Based on the trailer we have seen, as well as reading reports of complaints made by Tongans and Pacific Islanders when the program was broadcast in Australia and New Zealand, it is evident that the series mocks and misrepresents Tongan culture and customs. In the series, a white Australian actor, Chris Lilley, performs in brown make-up and a wig to depict a Tongan teen named Jonah. Jonah and his Tongan peers are portrayed as crude, disrespectful, and rebellious.

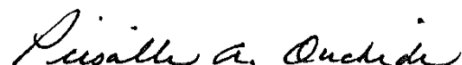
While the show is styled as a "mockumentary" comedy, it clearly perpetuates offensive stereotypes of the Tongan people. Especially in the absence of alternative depictions in the U.S. of Tonga and its people, "Jonah from Tonga" can seriously damage the perception and self-image of Tongan Americans. We are also alarmed at the series' casual use of "brownface," a staple technique of minstrel shows that was retired in the early part of the last century. The fact that HBO apparently saw no problem in 2014 with exposing American audiences to a white actor painted brown and pretending to be a juvenile delinquent of another race reveals the dire need for the network to address its diversity problems.

We collectively request an emergency meeting with HBO this week to discuss this urgent matter. Please contact Daniel Mayeda at 310.277.3333 or [DMAYEDA@LPSLA.COM](mailto:DMAYEDA@LPSLA.COM) to make such meeting arrangements.

Sincerely,



Daniel M. Mayeda, Co-Chair  
Legal Counsel  
East West Players



Priscilla Ouchida, Co-Chair  
Executive Director  
Japanese American Citizens League

Daniel M. Mayeda  
Co-Chair

Priscilla Ouchida  
Co-Chair

Asian American Justice Center  
<http://www.advancingequality.org>

East West Players  
[www.eastwestplayers.org](http://www.eastwestplayers.org)

Japanese American Citizens League  
[www.jacl.org](http://www.jacl.org)

Media Action Network for  
Asian Americans  
[www.manaa.org](http://www.manaa.org)

National Federation of Filipino  
American Associations  
[www.naffaausa.org](http://www.naffaausa.org)

OCA  
[www.ocanational.org](http://www.ocanational.org)

Visual Communications  
[www.vconline.org](http://www.vconline.org)