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NEWS CONFERENCE

The new information regarding recent allegations concerning smuggling, allegations in which the name of this religion was repeatedly bandied about, is so revolutionary, we doubt that you'll even choose to report it, even though it is distinctly your obligation to do so. The Southern California and other media have been having a field day victimizing the Hare Krishna movement, seizing every opportunity to discredit this religion and avoiding obvious opportunities to report on its true activities. This post-Jonestown dog-pack journalism and broadcasting is an example of persecution so intense and so unconscionable in this country of religious freedom that we have at last had to call a news conference just to expose the media itself.

In the present indictments, the media, by its highly prejudicial reporting, is implicating an entire religion for the alleged aberrant behavior of a tiny handful of its members, almost all of whom are excommunicated or not in good standing.

For example, this banner headline in 60-point type in the Santa Ana Register "Krishna Hash Bust" directly attacks and implicates this religion in criminal activity. This is reprehensible journalism at its very worst. If the defendants named had been Catholic or Jewish would it have printed a headline like this? We don't read of "Jewish Hash Bust" or "Catholic Hash Bust." Moreover, when these individuals were first implicated in crime over a year ago, the Register ran a similar banner headline in even larger type, "Krishna Cult Death Mystery." In this case

all charges against former Hare Krishna members were dropped.

After this first headline abuse, we warned the Register not to do this and to at least contact our organization (we gave them names and phone numbers) whenever they would choose to report news about us. They agreed to do this but they did not keep their word. When the present story broke, they did not contact our people whose names and telephone numbers we had given them. These headlines are defamatory, inflammatory and grossly at odds with the Society for Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics. Under Accuracy and Objectivity, Point 3 in the Code of Ethics it is stated: "Newspaper headlines should be fully warranted by the contents of the articles they accompany. Would this headline in the evening Outlook, "11 Krishna's Charged With Drug Smuggling," have read differently if the accused had been Protestant? Would it have read, "11 Protestants Charged With Drug Smuggling"?

This headline in yesterday's Los Angeles Times, "11 Linked to Krishna Cult Indicted in Narcotics Case," describes an indictment in which neither our religion nor even the word "Krishna" is once mentioned. If the defendants named had been Catholic, would the "West's largest newspaper" have headlined the article, "11 Linked to Catholic Church indicted in Narcotics Case?" Further, we have repeatedly requested the Times not to call our religion a cult, and we have distributed the enclosed pamphlet, which carefully explains we are not a cult, to Times reporters. These headlines are devastating and highly inflammatory. The headlines in these three newspapers constitute a form of religious persecution so serious and so severe as to immediately bring to mind the mood of the witch hunts of Salem and the McCarthy era. Such headlines,

the part of the newspapers which are most read and carry the most impact, shamelessly undermine the very Constitution of the United States.

The sad irony of this persecution is that our religion, the Hare Krishna movement, is far more successful in combatting drug abuse than the Drug Enforcement Agency itself. We attack the cause, not the symptom. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." We are an effective practicing and propaganda agency against drug abuse. These activities should have government support. For example, this article from Addictions Magazine, published by a Washington-based drug abuse organization, indicates that in Washington at the time of this publication we were almost 100 per cent effective in curing the addictions of those who entered our program. Further, here is a letter from the Mayor of New York commending us on our work in the field of drug abuse. Presently we have an active drug rehabilitation clinic in Melbourne, Australia for which we are likely to soon receive government funding

I would just like to reiterate the fact that we are not a cult. More than 500,000,000 follow this Bhagavad-gita, our book truth. Hinduism is the world's third largest religion, hardly a cult by any standards.

The media and federal agencies should in every way support the many benevolent activities of our religion (many of which are documented in this 108-page booklet) instead of seizing opportunities to discredit us while ignoring our good works.

In the third week of July of this year, Nancy Graham, a reporter for the Los Angeles Times spent several hours at our center here in Los Angeles touring the entire community, taking extensive notes and interviewing many people for a story on our

Annual Festival of the Chariots. This event, attended by more than 200,000 people annually, is one of the largest religious festivals in the West. Shortly following Ms. Graham's visit, a Times photographer came and took several pictures. The story was being written for the West Side Section, and surely this festival was the major event of West L.A. on that particular weekend. The article was never published. Instead the Times ran only one picture and it was placed directly opposite a long article critical of the Moonies. When we asked Ms. Graham about the bumping of her article, she said she was "not very happy about it." Further, although we have invited the Times religion writers to this festival every year, they have never attended the event, certainly one of the major religious events in their city.

Whenever the City of Los Angeles has made some move to re-direct or restrict our constitutional rights to distribute our religious literature, the Times has always been quick to publish the news, seldom (if ever) contacting us for "our side" of the story. For example, on October 5 of this year, when such a one-sided article appeared in the Times, we telephoned Times reporter Sharon Rosenhouse to request that our side be published and that she contact us in the future before reporting about us. We also wrote Times editor William F. Thomas, asking the newspaper to contact us when reporting on us in the future. Further, we sent a letter for publication in the letters-to-the-editor section of the Times. On the telephone Ms. Rosenhouse stated that neither she nor anyone on the editorial desk felt that it was necessary to contact us for our side of the story. To this day we have had no response from our letter to Ms. Rosenhouse, no response from Mr. Thomas, and our letter for publication in the letters section

was never printed. Here we have a clear-cut violation of Point 4 in the Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics: "News reports should be free of opinion or bias and represent all sides of an issue." This is not one incident, but it has happened repeatedly.

By contrast you might note that yesterday's Herald Examiner headline, "International Hashish Ring Smashed," deals with the indictments themselves and does not even name the defendants' alleged religious affiliations.

Although several television stations carried the story Tuesday, not one of them bothered to contact us for our side of the story, although we have repeatedly requested them to do so when reporting news on us. We have repeatedly sent you information and news with our names and telephone numbers. We were available in our offices all day Tuesday. All the TV news Tuesday implicated our religion.

The media is obligated to print good news as well as crime. But, as we all know, reporting on crime and violence is more profitable. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness is an organization which exists solely to improve the quality of life on this endangered planet (again I refer you to these documents which give only a smattering of the scope and depth of this Society's good works.)

Our work extends far beyond the bounds of religion to include health and nutrition, ecology, drug rehabilitation, social welfare to name only a few areas. For the media to constantly misrepresent, implicate and report partially and without thoroughness on our organization is a crime.

Finally, repeated vicious and unwarranted attacks on our religion by the media have so inflamed an innocent public

against our members and practices that they have been victims of kidnap, assault, sabotage, arson, fraud and even murder.

The implication of our religion for the alleged acts of members (which acts, if factual, would in themselves make them aberrant if, in fact, they were members at all) is completely illogical. It is like saying, "Mr. Smith is a criminal. Mr. Smith is a Mormon. Mormons are criminals." If even the President of CBS was convicted of selling prostitutes, would the media report that the network is a prostitute ring? The media must clean up its own act before wantonly attacking a bona fide religion. Such attacks are criminal.

We have not been named in this criminal indictment, but you, the media, have indicted us.