

**LETTER TO SPONSORS OF LONDON INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL  
FROM "RETHINKING AIDS" BOARD**

Dear Sponsor,

Rethinking AIDS is a non-profit worldwide voluntary network of scientists and academics that is appreciative of your support for educational, innovative and creative work in the genre of film. We were excited and impressed to hear that the 2016 London Independent Film Festival, that you sponsor, was proving its independence by selecting "Positive Hell" for screening, a documentary that lets people living with an HIV diagnosis tell their stories, despite contradicting some accepted wisdom about HIV and AIDS. We were confident this would broaden the discussion of this important health issue.

We were therefore shocked and disappointed to hear that the film had been withdrawn, without any appeal.

"Positive Hell" does not moralize, it simply tells the story of several Spanish people who have lived with an HIV-positive diagnosis for many years, largely without AIDS drugs. The director of LIFF, Erich Schultz, informed the film makers that, although the film had been officially selected, it was being withdrawn due to complaints from four AIDS charities. He also said that the decision to censor the film was unanimous by the same committee that had recently selected it for screening. The names of the four AIDS charities have been requested, but not provided. We have not been informed, despite asking, whether these groups gave reasons justifying censorship. Finally, the film makers were informed that there was no process for appeal or reconsideration.

Although we know that Erich Schultz leads the committee that selects films for screening, the names of the

committee members, whom we have been told are all students at his institution, are not public. Furthermore, although Schultz lists Royal Holloway College (University of London) as an institution where he teaches, they informed us that although he had done a PhD there, he was not on the list of staff members, and may never have taught there.

We believe that, at a minimum, the film makers should have received a list of reasons why the film was censored. There were threats of demonstrations at the screening from the LGBT club at the unknown institution where Erich Schultz teaches, and it would be shameful if there were only threats, and no stated reasons, that resulted in an "independent" film festival banning one of its selections.

As a sponsor of this film festival that has "Independent" in its name, you may feel as we do, that screenings should not be cancelled arbitrarily or capriciously, as this seems to discredit your support for an effort to showcase and celebrate exceptionally vibrant and compelling points of view that are otherwise sidelined and discounted because they are of negligible commercial value or run counter to commercial interests.

Rethinking AIDS is the largest organization of scientists, academics, doctors, journalists and others that questions the HIV=AIDS dogma, and one of our board members, Joan Shenton, is co-producer and writer of the film in question. We have an interest in data, and life affirming, positive examples of HIV positively stigmatized individuals finding a healthy life without debilitating drug regimes, such as that revealed by the stories in the film, that questions common beliefs about HIV and AIDS.

We would like to know if you support this act of censorship, whether you have any knowledge of the reasons for it that you can share with us, and whether you will communicate your feelings about the screening cancellation to LIFF.

Regards,

David Crowe  
President, Rethinking AIDS