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5 October, 2001

Mme. Nicole Pery  
Secretary of State for women's rights and vocational training  
Ministry of employment and solidarity  
8 , avenue de Ségur  
75350 Paris 07 SP  
FRANCE

Madame Secretary,

I am a Director and write you on behalf of the Naturist Action Committee. Our Committee is associated with The Naturist Society, a national organization of naturists in the United States. The goals of our Committee, as well as of The Naturist Society, is the promotion of naturism as a healthy way of life and the acceptance by our culture of the natural dignity of the human body, no matter what its age or physical condition.

We were amazed to read the report by Joelle Dietrich of Reuters of your remarks concerning a photo of Ms. Marianna Handler which appeared in the magazine "Colors" published by Benetton. The photo was accompanied by a text that explains that Ms. Handler is a naturist and that she takes care of a naturist beach in southern California. According to the Reuters report, you believe that the photo, rather than being a graphic representation of the dignity of Ms. Handler and of the human body, constitutes a "caricature" which makes Ms. Handler, and by extension all women, an "object" of the masculine gaze and degrades women's bodies.

I am a very close friend of Ms. Handler, and I can assure you that she is not anyone's "object." To the contrary, she has been a naturist for more than forty years and has fought fiercely for the acceptance of naturism in the United States. It is largely due to her efforts over more than ten years that San Onofre Beach, between San Diego and Los Angeles, has become accepted by the California authorities as a naturist beach. Ms. Handler believes, as do naturists in general, that the human body, male or female, young or old, is too beautiful and natural to be hidden beneath clothing, too beautiful and natural to be the object of an anachronistic shame and an unhealthy modesty. When we naturists appear in a photo, we do not see ourselves as objects at all, we live and proclaim our principles, and we believe deeply in them. Whoever views these photos and sees "objects" should cast a critical eye into her own soul and onto her own mores. Dignity is not found in clothing, but in the liberty of individuals and groups to live their philosophies and their principles of life without being framed in the stereotypes of those who view them.

We naturists here in America, struggling against the artificial constraints of a culture which is still too victorian, have always admired France as the "country of naturism", where the human body is accepted at hundreds of beaches as a completely normal and natural phenomenon (see *Paris Match* edition of August 2001). If you visit any one of these beaches during August, or if you go to the "naturist city" of Cap d'Agde, you will see countless women's bodies, from the most svelte to the most ample, from the youngest to the oldest, showing themselves without shame, without fear, without being "objects", in a spirit of complete liberty, equality and brotherhood. Naturists, with women such as Ms. Handler at the forefront, are the most fervent advocates of these principles.

To learn more about naturism and our respect for human rights, please contact the French Federation of Naturism at the following address or visit our web site,  
<http://www.naturistsociety.com/nacnef>.

Fédération française de naturisme  
65 rue de Toqueville,  
75 017 Paris  
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Sincerely yours,



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Copy of the Reuters article

## **Nudist pensioner lands Benetton in hot water**

**By Joelle Diderich**

PARIS, Oct 3 (Reuters) - Italian clothing and retail group Benetton landed in hot water again on Wednesday after a French government official denounced its new advertising campaign featuring a female nudist pensioner as a "pitiful provocation."

Nicole Pery, junior minister for women's rights, said that the image featuring the smiling woman standing in front of three men on a beach amounted to a caricature.

"From death row to the manipulation of the ageing body, Benetton aims to shock but constantly sickens," she said in a statement.

Benetton, whose controversial advertising campaigns have featured subjects ranging from death row inmates to dying AIDS patients, said the image was not designed to give offence.

"Benetton campaigns always divide public opinion a little bit, but this campaign is a very positive one which highlights the work of volunteers," said a spokeswoman for Benetton in France.

The global advertising campaign celebrates the United Nations International Year of the Volunteer and is endorsed by the international agency. It features 10 images of volunteers from across the world.

They include a Guatemalan transvestite sex worker who distributes free condoms, a former Salvadorean gang member who preaches against violence and an Afghan who runs a refugee centre in Pakistan. Benetton said the nudist, whose image first appeared in France in the Tuesday edition of the daily Liberation, was Marianna Handler, a retired German photographer living in California.

Handler holds the voluntary post of "Beach Mom" at her local nudist beach in San Onofre, where her duties include making sure people do not engage in sexual activities, obey parking regulations and refrain from littering.

"I wear a swimsuit in the pool at my mobile-home park and I wouldn't want a naturist wedding, but I'll fight tooth and nail to be naked here (on the beach)," Benetton's official website, [www.benetton.com](http://www.benetton.com), quotes Handler as saying.

"My biggest task is to educate people that nude is not lewd," she added.

The French government said it was not its intention to censor advertisers, but to prevent them from using women's bodies as objects in a way that was degrading.

Following an inquiry commissioned by Pery, lawmakers in the National Assembly have started work on a reform of a press freedom bill that would ban sexual discrimination and call on advertisers to show greater respect for women's dignity.

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