



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on December 18, 2012

Navy Caves In to Atheist Group, Scraps Live Nativity at Bahrain Base

An atheist group has succeeded in forcing the Navy to scrap an annual live nativity presentation at a naval base in Bahrain. The group, identifying itself as the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, sent a letter to the inspector general complaining that the Christmas display violated the Constitution's supposed separation of church and state.



According to the [Stars and Stripes](#) military newspaper, the nativity display, featuring children of military personnel dressed as Mary and Joseph, shepherds, and other characters from the Gospel account, had been scheduled for December 6 during an annual holiday ceremony hosted by the Naval Support Activity in Bahrain. The event was also to have included an appearance from "Mr. and Mrs. Claus and Camel," the paper said.

The atheist missive, sent prior to the event, complained that the nativity scene "is not just support for, but promotion of Christianity as the official religion of the base. This violates the Constitution and the mandates of the command to support all belief while privileging none."

According to [CBS News](#), the group also claimed it was concerned that the population of the Muslim country might see the Christian presentation and mistakenly believe that the the military force was Christian rather than secular. "The event is billed as a 'holiday' event," the letter pointed out, "but it is nothing but a Christian activity, and it is dishonest for the command to attempt to advertise the event as a 'holiday' activity when it is so clearly and exclusively biased toward Christianity.... This event threatens U.S. security and violates the Constitution as well as command policy."

The letter was enough to convince of the inspector general, who quickly had the nativity scene removed from the base's main courtyard. "Upon further review, the [Command Religious Program] will be removing the Living Nativity Program from the general base secular holiday festivities and co-locating it more appropriately with some of our other private religious and faith-based observances at the chapel at a separate time," the atheist group quoted the inspector general as writing.

A crew on the base had already started putting up the nativity structure, but was ordered to take it down. A spokesman for the atheists justified his group's actions, commenting to [Fox News](#): "We're talking about the United States promoting Christianity to defenseless little kids in bathrobes. We're talking about the United States government saying, 'Hey, we're going to have a bunch of kids out here and we're going to promote Christianity in a Muslim country to service members.'"



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The spokesman claimed his godless fringe wanted “to make sure that everybody has the opportunity to exercise their religion freely and we want to make sure people on the base have fun and exciting activities available for them without feeling like the base itself is establishing Christianity as the preferred belief system.”

Service members impacted by the decision were disappointed with the attack on the spirit of the season. “It was devastating,” an unidentified officer told Fox News. “Here we are serving in the Middle East, defending our country and other people’s religions and we couldn’t understand why we can’t enjoy our own religious freedoms.”

Said another officer: “You can go outside the gate and hear Christmas music, but on the base you can’t have a Nativity. The sense of hypocrisy is overwhelming.”

Stars and Stripes noted that Christmas is “openly celebrated in Bahrain among its Christian minority population. The Rev. Fredrick Peter D’souza of the Sacred Heart Church in Manama said the church’s Christmas Eve mass is held outdoors because it draws 4,000 people each year. D’souza said the Catholic church receives permission from the Bahraini government to hold the outdoor mass and has never had any problems with protesters or critics.”

Ron Crews, founder and president of the [Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty](#), said that it was disconcerting to see the Navy cave in to such intimidation rather than standing its ground “to allow military personnel to express their religious beliefs.” He added that it represented “another example of the military wrongly yielding to those who promote freedom from religion while squelching the constitutional protections for the free exercise of religion. Every American, especially those who wear the uniform, should be allowed to exercise their religious liberties.”



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