



November 16th, 2020

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

Attention:
Mr. David Ruben, President
Ms. Dawn Hudson, CEO

Dear Mr. Ruben and Ms. Hudson,

The Kazakh American community, alongside the worldwide Kazakh community, request that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences publicly bar *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm* from Oscar consideration due to the film's promotion of whitewashing, ethnic stereotyping, racism, cultural appropriation, and xenophobia.

The Kazakh community worldwide is underrepresented and inherently vulnerable. Our nation is still recovering from an oppressive colonial past, which is why we do not have substantial media representation. Sacha Baron Cohen understands this fact and exploits Kazakhstan by hijacking our ethnic identity, whitewashing us by portraying us as Eastern Europeans, and inciting harassment toward Kazakh people worldwide. Our people report countless cases of sexual and physical harassment as well as bullying due to the Borat franchise.

Considering today's socially aware political climate and the new policies adopted by the Academy, it is unbelievable that a racist film which openly berates, bullies, and traumatizes a nation of people of color is an acceptable form of entertainment.

Mr. Cohen, a wealthy white man, could have created a fake country, as he did with his film *The Dictator*. Instead, Mr. Cohen chose an actual country, the Republic of Kazakhstan, inhabited mostly by ethnic Kazakhs who are indigenous Central Asians. Mr. Cohen even stated, "I chose Kazakhstan because it was a place that almost nobody in the U.S. knew anything about." This quotation proves the exploitative nature of this film.

Mr. Cohen then proceeded to culturally appropriate and mock the Kazakh culture and traditions in the crudest way possible. Mr. Cohen has created a highly stereotypical and extremely offensive fictional character who relies on the Western audience having very little familiarity with Kazakhstan. Indeed, his target audience largely took Mr. Cohen's racist depiction at face value and considered it an accurate portrayal of our country (aided by Mr. Cohen's appropriation of our national symbols).

Mr. Cohen went beyond any moral or ethical standards in portraying Kazakh people as misogynistic, incestuous, anti-Semitic, and barbarous. Due to this harmful misrepresentation, more Kazakhs today will face public racial abuse, bullying, humiliation, and dehumanization. We understand that the nature of comedy is to break taboos and test the limits of what is acceptable, but at whose expense? Ethnic Kazakhs are relatively unknown, so we pose an easy



target for racism. This should not be justified as being “just a comedy,” especially not when we have witnessed firsthand the toll that racism takes on people’s lives.

Kazakhs live and work in many global communities, including in the United States. Since the release of the first *Borat* film in 2006, many Kazakhs have experienced psychological trauma and ethnic-based abuse and harassment. We have to explain to our friends, colleagues, and potential employers that “Borat Sagdiyev” does not represent reality.

Even though Kazakhstan is a small nation, it should not mean that its people should be a target of racism. If Mr. Cohen was mocking a Chinese, Black, or Jewish person, there would have been an international uproar and the Academy would not have been considering his racist film for any award nomination. Why is our small nation fair game for public ridicule?

Sacha Baron Cohen and his co-writers received an Academy Award nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay in 2006 for writing *Borat*. This must not happen again in 2020. We therefore call upon the Academy to publicly bar Mr. Cohen, his cast and crew, and the film, *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm*, from consideration at this year’s competition.

We hope that in the spirit of the Academy Aperture 2025 initiative, the Academy will not condone racial abuse and the cultural appropriation of Kazakhs in Mr. Cohen’s *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm*. We hope that the Academy chooses to do the right thing.

Looking forward to hear from you,



Ayauly Akylkhan *Ayauly Akylkhan*
Chair of the Board of Kazakh American Association



Gia Noortas, *Gia Noortas*
CEO Hollywood Film Academy LLC



Nihad Awad *Nihad Awad*
National Executive Director
Council on American-Islamic Relations

Hiba Rahim *Hiba Rahim*
Tampa Bay Regional Coordinator
Council on American-Islamic Relations - Florida