

13 April 2019

To the Max Mara Legal Team:

Once again, we thank you for responding to our previous message and still believe that we are, albeit quite slowly, on track to properly address this issue.

To begin, please allow us to address your preoccupation with whether or not the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre (TAEC) is the formal and legal representative of the Oma people. We appreciate this opportunity to clarify that we are not. The Oma have not hired us; we have no contractual obligations to them; nor do we seek any compensation from them or any other party for the work we are doing to raise awareness about this issue. TAEC simply discovered your company's wrongdoing, and as a supporter of the cultural heritage and livelihoods of the Oma and other ethnic minority groups, we felt it our responsibility to get involved. We work closely with the largest Oma community in Laos, and have been in communication with them about this problem and our actions to help rectify it.

Continuing on this theme, you have asked us to clarify what rights we feel have been violated, and the legal basis of our allegations. We have never asserted that what Max Mara has done is illegal. The Oma, a tiny ethnic group in a remote part of Laos, have not trademarked their designs, nor do they have any real awareness of intellectual property rights. We are saying that what Max Mara has done is unethical. For a company of your size, of any size, to profit from the sales of designs that are not original, without approval, acknowledgement, or compensation, is undeniably wrong. Plagiarism is defined as "the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own." Isn't it clear that Max Mara has done just that?

In your most recent message, you seem to focus on the denigration of your billion euro company by TAEC, but have not once taken seriously your clear disregard for the cultural property of the Oma people. Your repeated requests for us to remove our posts on social media and your threats of legal action show that your concern is solely with your own image, not with exploring your own moral culpability, and certainly not with fair treatment and respect of the traditions and cultural practices of the Oma.

While we do not plan to remove our social media posts, we have, once again, chosen not to publish your letter to us, upon your request. However, for the sake of transparency, we would like to suggest that going forward, we engage in this conversation in an open forum. We are not the only ones that are invested in resolving this matter. The mounting attention on social media platforms and in the press has made it clear that the public finds this issue important and would like to see a positive outcome.

Please understand that we are not asserting that you have intentionally copied the Oma's designs with any sort of malice or deliberate deception. However, now that the origin of the designs have come to light, you have the opportunity to position yourself as a leader in the fashion industry by rectifying the problem. Please, (1) pull the clothing line from your stores and online, (2) publicly commit to not plagiarising designs again, and (3) donate the proceeds already earned from the sale of these garments to an organisation of your choice that can help prevent situations like this in the future.