



FACE EQUALITY  
INTERNATIONAL

## Open Letter from Face Equality International

To challenge Amazon TV's casting of people with facial differences in the new Lord of the Rings series

***“If we tell the world that people with facial differences are monsters, we tell every child who is born with, or who acquires a facial difference, that they too are a monster.”***

We want to draw your urgent attention to the serious harm caused by the advert seeking ‘funky-looking people’ for the new Amazon TV series as reported [here](#), and in turn the negative impacts that will ensue if real-life people with facial differences are asked to play non-human, monster-like Orcs.

We assume the individuals sought with “overbite, face burns, long skinny limbs, deep cheek bones, lines on your face, acne scars, ears that stick out, bulbous or interesting noses, small eyes, big eyes, skinny faces, missing bones” will be cast as the Orcs. These non-human creatures are the most immoral, villainous and reviled characters in the stories whose very appearance is designed to invoke fear and disdain. **It is unfair, disgusting and degrading to ask people with facial differences to play such roles.**

Through this casting, the TV series will also undoubtedly perpetuate an old and out-dated face-ist stereotype in young minds: that people with facial differences are morally deficient, baddies, monsters to be feared and avoided. It will also justify more general ridicule and abuse in public places: [over a quarter of people with a visible difference have experienced a hate crime in their lives](#). This coupled with low expectations and achievement at school, fear of abuse online and at work, are common experiences for people with facial differences, at any age.

This face-ist stereotype continues to corrupt minds (adults’ and children’s) giving them ammunition and permission to continue oppressive behaviours and attitudes. Throughout history, theatre, film and the creative industries have exercised artistic freedoms to create negative depictions of minority groups, and so have produced harmful stereotypes which, in turn, led to discriminatory societal behaviours. Famously, the racial depiction in ‘Birth of a Nation’ or the trans character Buffalo Bill in ‘Silence of the Lambs’ have both incited hatred and distaste for minority groups who have historically been mocked or discriminated against.

We know that far too often, people with facial differences have suffered insulting bullying and name-calling after other Hollywood ‘baddies’ came on the screen. Like Two-Face, The Joker, Scar (from the Lion King), Freddy Krueger, and the many facially-different villains in the Bond movies – the upcoming Bond film ‘No Time to Die’ will have Rami Malek made up with prosthetic scarring to repeat the trick.

**FACE EQUALITY INTERNATIONAL**

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For children with a cleft lip and palate, facial burns, a hairy birthmark, acne or eczema, a squint or other unusual facial feature, their self-esteem and confidence can be dented for years when they see themselves represented so negatively. If we tell the world that people with facial differences are monsters, we tell every child who is born with, or who acquires a facial difference, that they too are a monster. **Why would a responsible industry wish to force this fate upon anyone?**

As a worldwide community of 36 NGOs representing and supporting people who have facial differences, we call on people from across our global societies to challenge this casting process.

We cannot achieve face equality – nor race equality – until creative professionals who have the power to influence culture so profoundly, can accept the role and responsibility they have to banish detrimental stereotypes.

Some film-makers and funders such as the British Film Institute have already realised that it is simply wrong to continue to portray ‘baddies’ with facial scars, asymmetry and skin conditions as they [pledged to no longer fund films using this damaging trope](#).

**Together, let us put undeniable pressure on the Amazon TV producers, directors and owner, Jeff Bezos who played an active role in securing this series.**

**We encourage them and everyone involved in the film and TV industries to commit to responsible casting and media portrayals.**

[Watch this film, to find out what face equality means to people with facial differences.](#)

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