

ion

LETTERS POLICY

The Daily Independent welcomes readers to submit letters to the editor for publication on the Opinion page.

- Letters must include the writer's full name, hometown and a daytime phone number (for verification).

- Letters must be no more than 500 words.
- All letters are subject to editing for clarity and length.
- We prefer to have letters typed or sent via e-mail. However, we will accept handwritten letters if legible.

- Letters that contain libelous or slanderous statements will be edited or rejected.

SEND YOUR LETTER TO
 Letter to the Editor, PO Box 7,
 Ridgecrest, CA 93556, or to
 editor@ridgecrestca.com

o Barrera at 375-4481 or editor@ridgecrestca.com

ANOTHER VIEW

Donating clothes is not always charity

By Michael Kryzanek
 GateHouse News Service

I, and probably many of you, have at one time dropped off old clothes at one of those containers that send our castaways to the poor in the less-developed world.

There are a number of these used-clothing organizations that are global in nature, and they are not alone in their commitment to those in need.

Professional sports teams have gotten on the bandwagon, as they give away hats, jerseys and Super Bowl T-shirts (usually from the losing team) all in an attempt to clothe the less fortunate. I once was in Hanoi, Vietnam, and saw a young man wearing a jacket from my beloved Green Bay Packers.

But all this goodwill (and in the case of the sports team, a charitable tax deduction) has begun to create a discussion in the international community about the real benefits of offloading tons of our excess to the poor of the world.

One of the most convincing arguments against this clothe-the-poor movement is the cost of sending all this stuff half way around the world when it would be better to develop a local cloth-

ing industry in these struggling countries that employs local people and puts money in their pockets. This is far better than standing in line to get a hand-me-down Celtic or Patriots T-shirt.

Today, one of the key elements of national economic development in the poor countries of the world is micro-financing, or providing small loans to fledgling entrepreneurs to start a business, usually in the areas of apparel or tourist trinkets. These small loans help build self-sufficiency and personal responsibility, and, most importantly, they have been shown to work. In short, what the poor of the world need is seed money, not used Nike sweat pants.

Because the dumping of unwanted clothing to the poor in places like Haiti or Kenya or the Philippines has become so widespread and been used as a sign of our altruism, international aid organizations have begun to notice a drop in dollar contributions. Also, some corporations, rather than give a cash donation, have developed marketing strategies that link a purchase of their product here in the U.S. with a transfer of their product to the developing world.

In our region, the exact impact of the overseas shipment of clothes is difficult to gauge, but a spokesman for Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries stated that their nonprofit faces increased competition for used clothing not just from these container operations but from other religious-based organizations. The key point made by Goodwill is that their clothes are sold or distributed locally, not internationally.

This debate about American altruism and corporate marketing efforts in the less developed world has also helped focus new attention on our foreign aid programs. There is growing pressure on the U.S. government to cut back on sending our food leftovers to poor countries and, instead, provide technical assistance to farmers so they can be self-sufficient. The most ridiculous example of U.S. food aid occurred in 2002, when we air dropped more than 2 million Pop Tarts on Afghanistan. Such food largesse only limits the opportunity for poor farmers to grow their own food and actually weakens the local agricultural economy.

There are times when the transfer of our clothing, food

and medical supplies are absolutely necessary, especially when a natural disaster hits a country or region. Moreover, Americans continue to be the most generous people on the planet, as we give often to help those in need. But it may be time to rethink whether donating an old Super Bowl T-shirt or jogging outfit is the best way to help the poor who have little.

The problem is these clothing containers are everywhere, and it is convenient to drive by and make a donation. More importantly, it is not that easy for a donor to know which international charity to send a check to, since there are always unscrupulous operators cashing in on the generosity of others.

I guess the best answer to this international charity conundrum is to continue to give clothing to the world's poor but also to do some due diligence and find a charity that desperately needs U.S. dollars to further their good works.

Michael Kryzanek is executive director of the Center for International Engagement at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts. He can be reached on Twitter @MikeKryzanek.