



STATEMENT FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Since 2007, messages including the term “Israeli Apartheid” have appeared in the Toronto Pride Parade. Pride Toronto has issued several statements in support of freedom of speech for all participants. However, in the past year, Pride Toronto has been subjected to extensive lobbying by varied interest groups on all sides of this debate, and has received complaints of discriminatory and exclusionary messaging. The issue has escalated to a point where Toronto’s Pride festival is in a state of operational crisis. In response to this immediate call-to-action, on May 21st, 2010, the Board of Directors of Pride Toronto voted to disallow the use of the term “Israeli Apartheid”, or any combination of this notion, in the Pride Parade.

Pride Toronto’s responsibility is to our LGBTTIQQ2SA communities. Pride Toronto has seen many struggles over the past 30 years, and alongside other Pride festivals around the globe, is no stranger to conflict, mixed opinions, and passionate voices. Keep in mind that within our diverse communities, there are many perspectives and opinions to be shared and discussed equally. Pride Toronto is tasked with creating a 10-day festival that acknowledges these voices, while simultaneously creating an all-inviting, inclusive space for its participants.

We are fortunate to have extensive City support for Pride. As a key partner, the City of Toronto has expressed concern about the presence of the term “Israeli Apartheid” in the Parade. The City has noted that the message of “Israeli apartheid” may contravene its anti-discrimination policy in relation to a person’s “place of origin”. Pride Toronto is obliged to respect and follow this policy, a policy that also protects the rights of our communities against discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, and take such considerations into our decision-making process.

Recently, a motion has been tabled at City Council to revoke Pride Toronto’s funding and in-kind support services should this message appear in the Parade. In addition, we have experienced a loss of funding, lowered participation rates, decreased staff and volunteer morale and the over-extension of our organization’s resources as a result of this irresolvable debate.

The Festival is in jeopardy and we need to acknowledge this. To not have a celebration is unacceptable and would be detrimental to the experience of millions and to the existence of this

organization. As we celebrate 30 Years of Pride in 2010, this will not be the year we see our festival cancelled because of any one specific message.

Also top of mind is the safety of our participants and attendees. There have been several threats of violence toward Pride Toronto and its participants in our Parade and Community Fair. It is our responsibility to look at how this will impact the safety and continued viability of the parade and festival site. Whether pressure is proven or alleged, one thing is for certain – that our resources have been strained, and we cannot keep on this path of negativity and anger.

The Board of Directors at Pride Toronto has taken the time needed to thoroughly review these concerns and has led to our passing of the resolution, as stated previously. As the senior Co-Chair, I can confidently say that all facets were weighed to the best of our ability and we came to this as a decision with the best interest of our organization, our participants and the survival of our festival in mind.

We must endeavor to move ahead and focus on the remaining five weeks before the festival. We have full confidence in the staff and volunteers who have worked so hard this year to make Pride happen - they are the backbone of Pride Toronto. I thank them for their professionalism and dedication, especially under the tremendous pressure of this debate.

Pride is vital to the queer community in Toronto. There are many festivals in our City. But what sets Pride apart is our diversity, our size and our sexual identities, with Queer Rights up-front and centre in our celebration.

We recognize that there is still much to march about – much left to achieve - in the name of Queer Rights in Canada and around the world. As we look to the struggles of queers in Russia, Uganda, Jamaica and Latvia, amongst many others, the fact that Pride in Toronto exists as a large, multifaceted celebration is a statement in and of itself. In order to maintain this status, Pride Toronto must create a welcoming environment for the millions of Queer people we impact at home and around the world.

It IS possible to fight for queer rights without crippling one of the largest celebrations of queer rights in the world: Our “Global Human Rights for Queers: What Out Is About” program clearly

demonstrates that. It has gained attention around the world and we expect that, at WorldPride 2014, this program will catalyze significant and positive change for queer human rights.

Our organization works diligently to find a balance between the varied voices brought to the steps of Pride. We welcome the space for debates and discussions. We hope that over time, there will be a way for people to use language that can promote education and knowledge over anger and hatred. This path is necessary for sustainability, to keep our festival's voice alive, and heard worldwide.

We urge members of our communities to continue their support for Pride in 2010 and beyond.

Press Kit Materials:

- 1) Mission Vision Values
- 2) Pride Toronto History
- 3) History surrounding this issue
- 4) Resolution of the Board
- 5) Allocation of funding (pie chart) / Funding facts
- 6) City Anti-Discrimination Policy
- 7) City Motion