



January 21, 2010

Tracey Sandilands
Executive Director
Pride Toronto
14 Dundonald Street
Toronto, Ontario M4Y 1K2

Dear Ms. Sandilands

In response to your press release of January 19, 2010 (Pride reviews strategies for 30th anniversary), I am writing to express my shock and concern that Pride Toronto has chosen to follow the route of focus groups to determine if Israel and Jew-bashing is an acceptable practice. We believe this is an effort to gain legitimacy for individuals and organizations who choose to promote antisemitism by falsely presenting Israel as an apartheid state.

Unfortunately, the welcoming and inclusive nature of the Gay Pride Day parade has been hijacked by a political agenda which has nothing to do with celebrating the right of individuals to express their sexual identity. Instead, this fantastic event - which should be a showcase of tolerance and diversity - is now a battleground, with the Jewish population of Toronto, and in particular the majority of Jewish members of Pride, as its first casualty. As targets of Queers against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA), these members no longer feel welcome to participate in the parade; indeed, they feel vulnerable and targeted by hatred and potential violence, and this is a disgrace.

If allowed to continue, this battleground will expand as other groups with equally hostile and questionable politics demand their right to participate in the Pride parade. Will they also have the right to hold their banners and promote their causes, or is that privilege reserved exclusively for those who seek to frighten and silence the gay Jewish population of Toronto?

Strident voices within the anti-Israel community shout down those who would oppose their hatred, with the rallying cry of political activism and social justice. Yet we hear no concerted gay opposition to the fanatic extremism displayed by Muslim countries around the world as they persecute, torture and execute those deemed 'social deviants' in their own countries. Where are the Queers marching against the Muslim-led genocide in Darfur, or the Lesbians fighting against the practice of honour killings of young girls throughout the Muslim world? Who is their voice and where is their justice?

As the Executive Director of the organization, these are serious questions which you must answer for yourself; they cannot be farmed out to a focus group – likely comprised of antisemites of all stripes – to make this decision for you. At issue is the future of the Pride parade and how you see that future playing out. The expectation of my organization is that Pride will once again be a celebration of gay rights. Depending on what you decide, it could just as easily turn into a divisive protest march as myriad groups, both legitimate and otherwise, use the parade as a forum to advance their causes. It is difficult for me to believe this is direction you hope the parade will take, but if QuAIA is allowed to participate, it is the path that will inevitably follow.

If this new course of action is one that Pride Toronto intends to pursue, the citizens of Toronto should be made aware that it conflicts with the city's anti-discrimination guidelines. The Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies will continue to voice our concern over the hatred emanating from the Gay Pride committee to the City of Toronto, to leaders of the Provincial and Federal Governments, as well as to sponsoring organizations regarding their support of Pride and the direction it chooses to follow.

However, if you and the members of Pride Toronto wish to learn more about tolerance and the importance of respecting diversity, I encourage you to visit our Center and welcome the opportunity to meet with you to continue this important conversation.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Avi Benlolo
President and Chief Executive Officer
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