Caution Needed When Promoting Red Maple Reading Program

February 17, 2010 (TORONTO) –Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies (FSWC) would like to extend a caution to all educators who are promoting the Ontario Library Association's 2010 Red Maple program. One of the titles, *The Shepherd's Granddaughter* by Anne Laurel Carter, provides a fictionalized, one-sided view of the Middle East conflict that cannot be simplified in the manner that it is presented. We are extremely concerned this over-simplification of a complicated matter has clear potential to incite hatred and violence against Jewish and Israeli students.

In the book, Amani, a fictional Palestinian girl, wishes to follow in her grandfather's footsteps to become a shepherd. While she realizes this dream, the rest of her life falls apart with a series of fictionalized injustices meted out by Israelis – including poisoning her sheep, shooting her dog, beating and unjustifiably imprisoning her brother and father, and destroying her home. A review written by a reader on goodreads.com stated: "Reading this book made me want to go to Palestine and kill Israelis." This book is being placed in the hands of Grade 7 and 8 students, most of whom don't have any knowledge of the history of the conflict; the danger of this fictionalized book without additional context, a balanced viewpoint and further education is inevitable.

FSWC does not support censorship; our goals are to promote tolerance and justice. The need for critical thinking and presentation of different viewpoints is, especially in education, imperative. The Ontario Library Association's choice to include the Palestinian viewpoint without Israeli representation is irresponsible and in direct violation of its mandate to promote the "health and growth of a free society." In addition, the one-sided, fictionalized presentation of such an emotionally charged issue does not "maintain the right of intellectual freedom", but will inevitably provoke an emotional response, which is clearly not in keeping with the Association's mandate to promote intellectual freedom.

About Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies

Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies is a Canadian human rights organization dedicated to fostering tolerance and understanding through community involvement, educational outreach and social action. It has 25,000 members across Canada, and confronts important contemporary issues including racism, antisemitism, terrorism and genocide. The Center is affiliated with the world-wide, Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, an accredited Non-Government Organization with status at international agencies, including the United Nations, UNESCO, OSCE and the Council of Europe. With over 400,000 members of all faiths around the world, the Simon Wiesenthal Center has offices in New York, Miami, Paris, Jerusalem, Buenos Aires and Toronto.

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DIRECT ACTION

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