

## Pride funds in jeopardy if group allowed

Queers against Israeli Apartheid plans to march

**Megan O'Toole, National Post**

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Pride Toronto will not rule out allowing the controversial Queers Against Israeli Apartheid group to participate in this summer's gay pride parade, even as the city warns this could affect future funding for the event.

Last year, the group spurred outrage by likening Israel to an apartheid state during chants that some observers said contained violent overtones; some members wore T-shirts with crossed-out swastikas and slogans denouncing "Israeli apartheid."

City officials have said publicly that the group's behaviour likely violated the city's anti-discrimination policy, and because Pride Toronto allowed QuAIA to participate, a repeat display this year could result in the city cutting funding for Gay Pride Week. Yesterday, Mayor David Miller said that in order for groups to get grants -- Pride received about \$120,000 last year -- they must adhere to city policies.

"Pride is a celebration. It is about freedom of expression and human rights, but it's also a place where people have to respect others' human rights," Mr. Miller said. "[F]or example, if people have hate symbols, like swastikas, in the parade it would be up to Pride to make sure that those symbols aren't used."

Tracey Sandilands, executive director of Pride Toronto, acknowledged having met with city staff about the funding issue and the need to provide a "positive and welcoming space" for all participants. But she played down immediate concerns

about QuAIA, noting the group has not even applied yet to be a part of this year's parade; the deadline for applications is June 4.

"Based on whatever they put in that application we will determine whether or not they are accepted," Ms. Sandilands said. "Our intention is to include as many people as we possibly can."

Jenny Peto, a spokesperson for QuAIA, yesterday confirmed the group plans to participate in this year's parade, saying they "will not back down in the face of threats and intimidation.

"We will march in Pride Toronto 2010 because we are proud of our politics and our solidarity with Palestinians, queer and straight."

The online application form asks groups to provide the "theme" of their entry, and to agree to a set of terms and conditions that fall in line with antidiscrimination policies. This year, the terms have been updated to include consequences if any group violates those policies, which range from asking them to leave the parade immediately, banning them from future parades, pursuing legal action or having charges laid.

If a group's application raises any flags, Ms. Sandilands said, a Pride Toronto committee will set up a secondary meeting to clarify concerns.

"Their messaging must indicate that the parade will not be made unwelcoming to anybody else in any way," she said.

At the parade itself, a group decked out in swastikas, for example, would be asked to leave -- but guidelines on a crossed-out swastika, which may be seen as an anti-fascist emblem, "are not that clear," Ms. Sandilands said. In terms of chanting, the wording would be key: "Anything that has the potential to incite violence and hatred will not be permitted."

The issue of calling Israel an apartheid state, controversial on the face of it, is still being looked at, she said.

"We don't have any ability or any legal standing to ban anyone on the basis of their name," Ms. Sandilands said.

Yet Avi Benlolo, president of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre for Holocaust Studies, maintains QuAIA's name is a "complete and utter lie" that foments hatred and anti-Semitism. His organization is calling for an immediate cease on city funding for Pride until they release a statement banning such groups.

"The city of Toronto, its streets and also the funding that comes from taxpayers should not be abused in this way, which makes the city of Toronto complicit in discrimination," Mr. Benlolo said. All major mayoral candidates have stepped forward to urge a ban on QuAIA at this year's parade, he noted, so "where is Mayor Miller on this issue and why has he not stepped in and said, 'Absolutely not, we're not going to fund it?'"

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