

**Independent Jewish Voices
P.O. Box 23088
Ottawa, Ontario K2A 4E2**

April 27, 2010

Mr. David Miller, Mayor
City of Toronto
2nd floor, 100 Queens Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5H 2N2

Dear Mr. Mayor Miller:

I am writing to condemn comments made by Mike Williams, General Manager, Economic Development and Culture and Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, City Manager of Diversity Management and Community Engagement to the Toronto Star on April 19 about funding for Toronto Pride. Their comments serve to restrict the freedom of expression of organizations that wish to participate in the Toronto Gay Pride parade, specifically Queers Against Israel Apartheid (QuAIA).

The Star quotes Mr. Williams as saying that the participation of QuAIA in the Gay Pride parade violated the City of Toronto's anti-discrimination policy. Having an organizational name or slogan and literature based on a political position does not constitute discrimination. In this case, the term apartheid is being applied to describe actions of the State of Israel. Opposition to the policy of a state does not constitute hate speech. In our view, denying QuAIA's participation in the Toronto Pride parade on the basis of its political expression would contravene the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In quotes attributed to her by The Star, Ms. Ramkhalawansingh said that racism creates a poisoned environment where not everyone feels welcome. But criticism of a government or its policy does not constitute racial harassment. Such criticism constitutes political comment and opposition to a political ideology – in this instance, Zionism, and practices based upon it in Israel.

These members of your staff assert that describing Israel as an apartheid state constitutes a form of racial harassment. While such a position may generate outrage among certain people, it does not constitute racial harassment. Some organizations or individuals are free to strongly disagree with criticism of a particular government or its

governing ideology. But they are going too far when they try to have such criticism suppressed.

The City of Toronto must not be seen as trying to impose limitations on organizations' freedom of speech as a condition of their receiving funding. These threats against Pride Toronto must be publicly repudiated.

Yours truly,

Sid Shniad

IJV Spokesperson

cc: Tracey Sandilands, Executive Director, Pride Toronto
Queers Against Israeli Apartheid

Independent Jewish Voices – Canada is a national human rights organization whose mandate is to promote a just resolution to the dispute in Israel and Palestine through the application of international law and respect for the human rights of all parties. IJV has chapters in Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton, Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Vancouver plus many individual members.