

**Palestinian Queers for Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions (PQBDS) salute Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA) for their courageous stance against Apartheid and condemn the City of Toronto for its blunt threat to freedom of speech!**

[Occupied Palestine - April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010] According to the Toronto Star (April 18, 2010) the city of Toronto may pull funding from next year's Pride Parade (2011) if Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA) is allowed to march in the parade this year (2010). City bureaucrats have claimed that QuAIA's rhetoric contradicts the city's anti-discrimination policy. As queer Palestinians, we view this as a direct attack on freedom of speech and expression, and clear discrimination against a group of individuals based on their political views.

**Palestinian Queers for BDS (PQBDS) call upon the City of Toronto to reverse its decision and we call on Queer activists around the world to speak up against these threats.** Pride Marches are spaces designed to exhibit freedom of expression including protests of injustice wherever they may occur.

The City of Toronto's decision is an alarming and unprecedented threat to freedom of speech, especially for Queers engaging in political action. Pride parades around the world have not only been a platform for queers to increase public awareness about LGBTQI issues, but also a platform to promote justice and fight against oppression. Pride parades have always supported the feminist struggle and played a part in the struggle to end Apartheid in South Africa. Therefore, we strongly believe that QuAIA's participation in Toronto pride is unquestionably legitimate.

Palestinian Queers for BDS (PQBDS) is a group of Palestinian queer activists who live in the Palestinian Occupied Territory and inside Israel, who came together to promote and stand for the Palestinian civil society call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel that was launched in July 2005. As an integral part of Palestinian society we believe that the struggle for sexual and gender diversity is interconnected with the Palestinian struggle for freedom. We believe that the BDS campaign is an effective way of resistance that represents the majority of Palestinian people: the refugees in exile, Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the subjugated Palestinian citizens of the Israeli state.

Therefore, we salute QuAIA for their courageous and moral stance against Israeli apartheid and Israel's blatant disregard of international law, and we support QuAIA for their outstanding solidarity actions, including the refusal to be silenced by the decision of the City of Toronto. We believe that your stance for Palestinian rights is an example of your principled ideology and dedication to speaking out against all kinds of oppression, in particular against Israeli apartheid. Only a year and a half has passed since Israel's brutal war of aggression on the besieged Gaza Strip, which killed over 1440 Palestinians, of whom 431 were children, and wounded 5380 others. According to Judge

Goldstone's report Israel committed war crimes and possible crimes against humanity during this assault. To this day, Israel continues to imprison 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip under a siege that has been described as 'a prelude to genocide' by respected UN Rapporteur Richard Falk. Israel continues to deny over 7 million Palestinian refugees their UN sanctioned right to return to their homes from which they were expelled in the 1948 *Nakba*. Palestinian citizens of Israel continue to be treated as second class citizens, with over 30 Israeli laws clearly discriminating against them as non-Jewish citizens of the state, where rampant discrimination and differential access to services is the norm. Palestinians in the West Bank are suffocated by an Apartheid wall, ruled illegal by the International Court of Justice, with its connected system of Israeli-only roads, with settlements and checkpoints for the Palestinian population.

As Palestinian queers, our struggle is not only against social injustice and our rights as a queer minority in Palestinian society, but rather, our main struggle is one against Israel's colonization, occupation and apartheid; a system that has oppressed us for the past 63 years. Violations of human rights and international law, suppression of basic rights and civil liberty, and discrimination are deeply rooted in Israel's policies toward Palestinians, straight and gay alike.

Banning QuAIA from participating in Toronto Pride this year would be a violation of the true spirit of Pride and the movement for queer rights, including queer expression. Thus we call upon the Toronto City Council to reverse their decision, uphold freedom of speech, and support the struggle to keep Toronto Pride an open space for all.

In solidarity,

Palestinian Queers for BDS

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