



TORONTO PRIDE ORGANIZERS BAN ANTI-ZIONIST GROUP

By Joseph Brean

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Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA), an anti-Zionist protest group that made corporate sponsors squirm by flying banners at last year's Toronto Pride parade, has been banned this year, along with any other group that would advance a political agenda.

"We will be very much more careful this year. We will make sure that we have a presence to ensure that people don't slip into the parade," Pride Toronto executive director Tracey Sandilands said today.

The number of volunteer marshals along the barricades is to be increased from 25 to 80 to prevent unauthorized people joining the parade, she said.

"What happened last year was ... people on the sidelines who pushed into the parade and put up banners. We were totally not expecting it," she said.

Her announcement came with a warning to grand marshal El-Farouk Khaki not to use his ceremonial position as a pulpit to promote an anti-Israeli boycott.

Frank Dimant, executive vice-president of B'nai Brith Canada, today called for disciplinary action against Mr. Khaki, a founder of the national support group Salaam: Queer Muslim Community, because he spoke to a QuAIA event on the weekend.

A flier for the event said "Israel has now begun to frame itself as a tolerant, queer-positive democracy. This can never be reality under Occupation."

Mr. Dimant said Mr. Khaki's presence -- he made opening remarks and welcomed the main speakers -- "has already contravened Pride Toronto's stated policy."

Mr. Khaki declined to comment today.

"The grand marshal is not an official spokesperson," Ms. Sandilands said. "He has committed to us that his sponsors for the parade are all organizations that have nothing to do with the Israeli issue, and that he will never under any circumstances speak on the Israeli issue from a Pride point of view."

Pride Toronto's discrimination policy is the same one mandated by the City of Toronto for all organizations it funds, which "prohibits discrimination and harassment and protects the right to be free of hate activity," based on 19 grounds. These include all the eight grounds in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, plus others, including political affiliation.

Ms. Sandilands said she often gets requests to ban various groups because of protest movements, and gave the example of the Canadian Forces.

“We do not support or endorse any political cause,” she said. “Our parade is going to be about the spirit of Pride.”

Unlike other Pride parades around the world, neither individuals nor unauthorized groups may walk in Toronto’s parade, for both legal and liability reasons.

“We can’t afford to have individuals landing under the wheels of a float,” Ms. Sandilands said.

QuAIA’s most prominent member, film-maker and York University professor John Greyson, said he wonders whether today’s decision signals that social justice activism is being “wholeheartedly cut out of Pride.”

“To take activism out of Pride really takes it back to a place of shame,” he said. “I don’t think I’ve ever been to a Pride where I wasn’t part of an explicitly political action, and we were trying to be as militant as possible... The whole purpose of Pride was about visibility and fighting for our equal space in society, so for them to start saying ‘Oh, but you don’t have equal space’ just turns back the clock in an extraordinary way, and is really unacceptable.”

B'nai Brith Canada has been active in Canada since 1875 as the foremost Jewish human rights organization. To learn more about its advocacy work and diverse community and social programs, please visit <http://www.bnaibrith.ca>.