



**For immediate release**

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## **STATEMENT FROM PRIDE TORONTO**

Pride Toronto has seen many struggles over the past 30 years, and alongside other Pride festivals around the globe, is no stranger to conflict, mixed opinions, and passionate voices. Within our diverse community, there are many perspectives and opinions to be shared and discussed equally. Pride Toronto is tasked with creating a 10-day festival that acknowledges these voices, while simultaneously creating an inviting, inclusive space for participants.

Pride Toronto respects differences - of opinion, nationality, race, creed, and most of all sexuality and gender orientation. We abandon respect and freedom of expression at our peril. Our decision to restrict the use of the words "Israeli Apartheid" was not made easily, independently, or absent of a commitment to respectful expression. Let us be clear, criticism of Israeli government policy is legitimate. However, the atmosphere created by the use of the words "Israeli Apartheid" in the last three years of the Pride Festival are not.

The Board of Pride Toronto listened to members of our community. What we heard overwhelmingly was that the use of the words "Israeli Apartheid" made participants feel unsafe. For that reason we asked members of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA) to re-evaluate their approach when participating in Pride activities – that is not only our right as a Board but our obligation. QuAIA is not being banned from this year's festival. We are restricting the use of words and phrases that can promote a poisonous atmosphere and detract from the goal of celebrating diversity within our community. No Canadian, Queer or Straight, should have to worry about their safety in a public space because of who they are or what they believe. It is regrettable that some former participants of the Parade are choosing not to participate this year but we respect the difficulty of their decision.

The public presence of the festival, particularly the Pride Parade, is a powerful statement that promotes acceptance of our community. The festival is possible in large part because of our partnership with the City of Toronto. Pride Toronto is obliged to respect various city policies, including the anti-discrimination policy. We take the anti-discrimination policy very seriously as

this policy also protects the rights of members of our communities against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict evokes passionate disagreement. However, it should not damage the good work of Pride Toronto and it should not divide Canadian communities. Toronto's Pride Festival is a celebration of tolerance, of difference, and a demonstration that supports the provision of full and equal rights for members of the LGBTTIQQ2SA community. We hope that our participants can accept the differences within our diverse communities, and come together at the Pride Festival to show their support for each other.

**About Pride Toronto:**

**Pride Toronto** is the not-for-profit organization that hosts Pride Week, an annual festival held during the first weekend of July in downtown Toronto. Pride Toronto exists to celebrate the history, courage, diversity and future of Toronto's LGBTTIQQ2SA\* communities and is one of the leading cultural events of its kind in the world with a total economic benefit in 2009 of \$136 million.

Toronto's Pride Week has been named Best Festival in Canada by the Canadian Special Events Industry in 2004, 2005 and 2009, and is recognized as one of only eight Signature Events in the City of Toronto. It is ranked one of the TOP 50 festivals in Ontario by Festivals and Events Ontario (FEO) as well as one of the 18 Marquee Festivals of Distinction in Canada. With attendance of over 1,2 million, it is the third largest Pride celebration in the world and the largest in North America. For media accreditation for the festival, please visit <http://www.pridetoronto.com>.

\*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, 2-Spirited and Allies

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