



– FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –

Toronto Gay Pride Parade Grand Marshal resigns over Pride Board's censorship of QuAIA; 23 others return awards in protest

Toronto, June 7, 2010 — On May 28, Pride Toronto's choice for grand marshal of the 2010 Pride Parade rejected his appointment, citing the organization's censorship of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA). "I have been actively involved in many social justice movements locally and internationally for more than thirty years," said Dr. Alan Li, a co-founder of Gay Asians Toronto, Asian Community AIDS Services, the multicultural Coalition Against Homophobia, and the first openly gay president of the Chinese Canadian National Council. "I thus remember very clearly our community's battles against censorship that attempted to invalidate our concerns, minimize our struggles and silence our voices."

Li listed his concerns in greater detail, explaining, "Pride's recent decision to ban the term 'Israeli Apartheid' and thus prohibit the participation of the group *Queers Against Israeli Apartheid* . . . in Pride celebrations this year is a slap in the face to our history of diverse voices. Pride's choice to take a pre-emptive step to censor our own communities' voices and concerns in response to political and corporate pressure shows a lack of backbone to stand up for principles of inclusiveness and anti-oppression."

On May 21, the Pride Week Board, already reeling from federal funding cuts, had voted to "disallow" the use of the term "Israeli Apartheid," or "any combination of this notion," in the Pride Festival. The board's decision was taken in response to a motion by Toronto City Councillor and mayoralty candidate George Mammoliti to have City Council inform Pride Week organizers that the City's funding for the event would be withdrawn if Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA) were allowed to march in the parade, one of the largest of its nature in North America.

Li's announcement came one day after the original founders of Toronto's Pride Week, which began in 1981, sent an open letter to current Pride organizers, saying "We stand totally opposed to the decision of the current Toronto Pride Committee to ban the use of 'Israeli Apartheid' at Toronto Pride events. (...) Solidarity with all struggles against oppression has been a crucial part of the history of Pride." Today, another 23 gay activists previously honoured by Toronto's Gay Pride Week signed a letter returning their awards to protest the Pride board's decision.

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) welcomes Dr. Li's courageous decision and calls on Pride Week organizers to rescind their decision. CJPME President Thomas Woodley also said, "We stand with QuAIA in vigorously opposing this censorship of free speech, and again call on Toronto City Council to indicate to Pride Week organizers that it will reject Mammoliti's motion if it comes before the Council's executive committee." The Toronto City Council is scheduled to meet on June 14.

About CJPME – *Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) is a non-profit and secular organization bringing together men and women of all backgrounds who labour to see justice and peace take root again in the Middle East. Its mission is to empower decision-makers to view all sides with fairness and to promote the equitable and sustainable development of the region*

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