

**Statement of Concern Regarding the TAVIS Policing of the**

**Downtown Eastside during the World Pride Event**

June 24, 2014

Queer Ontario is very concerned about the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS) policing initiative of the downtown eastside scheduled to coincide with the World Pride (WP) event. As many visitors to Toronto are expected during this major tourism event, we are concerned that the police are stepping up their intervention and surveillance of marginalized and vulnerable downtown eastside residents. We are concerned that the police are using a global tourism event as a pretext to crackdown on the area’s poor residents, the homeless, street-based sex workers, drug users, and others essentially engaging in an "undesirables cleansing" of the area.

We are concerned that the rights of our most vulnerable citizens will be violated during the TAVIS policing effort as its policy of targeted ‘prevention’ of crime does little to address the social and economic marginality that the area’s residents face -- a social and economic situation marked by poverty, racism, gender violence, homelessness and discrimination. Especially vulnerable are the area’s female and female-identified transsexual and transgendered street-based sex workers and the local drug-using population. Adding to the problem is the fact that the downtown eastside is where many of the social services that the residents rely on are located--forcibly displacing local residents would thereby compound their difficulties.

As the TAVIS policing effort is contemporaneous with the World Pride event, we are especially concerned that the World Pride Committee not remain silent on this issue facing our poor and disenfranchised residents of the downtown eastside, and area which is adjacent to the Church Street Village and which is home to many of the city’s LGBTQ population. We are asking the World Pride organizers not to remain silent on this issue and to remember the history of policing in our LGBTQ communities. Heavy-handed and discriminatory practices by the police are not unknown to LGBTQ folks, past and present. Everyone has a right to the city and to unhindered access to the services many need to survive; not a few of whom will be directly affected by the TAVIS effort will themselves be LGBTQ people, and are, by and large, unable to afford many of the events WP has to offer.

We at Queer Ontario urge you to take this issue seriously as there are many people in our communities and beyond who are expecting World Pride organizers to remember our queer history and to act accordingly, working with the police to temper their activities during this time. We hope WP does not choose to engage in a shameful silence when the cops do the work of violating the rights of some of the most vulnerable members of the public and our poor citizens. We urge you to consider your role, as leaders of global events attached to a Human Rights Conference to not become a force for denying the same rights that queers/trans folks have had to fight for decades to obtain.

This is a very important issue for how events are going to be organized in this city now and for years to come. We ask that WP organizers step up and make their voices heard for the more marginalized citizens in the downtown area. We request that they not let a major global event become a handmaiden of short-sighted policing efforts and the displacement of the poor and marginalized, which have often accompanied such global entertainment and sporting events worldwide.

**Queer Ontario** is a provincial network of gender and sexually diverse individuals — and their allies — who are committed to questioning, challenging, and reforming the laws, institutional practices, and social norms that regulate queer people.