

OPEN LETTER ON BLACK LIVES MATTER - LONDON'S PARTNERSHIP WITH PRIDE LONDON FESTIVAL

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There has been a lot of conversation and news within the past few days that affects our community. The Black Queer Network, while a relatively new group has not been invited to be part of these conversations but would still like to share our thoughts on recent developments. We hesitated at first because we know that like any community there are varying stances and opinions. However we realized that it is exactly moments like this where no one speaks out with their concerns, that enable oppression to continue. A culture of silence is one that harms us all.

One of responsibilities of new community groups and organizations is to listen to the words of our elders, those who have been doing the work for longer than we have and those in our community. It is one of the reasons that we created our survey to ensure we were not only speaking from our own personal experiences and from the stories we have heard over the years. It is also necessary to consult and do the work to connect with other groups who are already doing the work and have established themselves as inclusive and trustworthy.

We have heard over and over again in our survey results and in the conversations we have that Pride London Festival receives a failing grade in diversity and inclusivity as it relates to race in our community. We honor the experiences and the stories of our community. We stand with our LGBT2Q+ Indigenous and People of Colour family.

We were shocked and disappointed to learn of a partnership with the Black Lives Matter - London Ontario and Pride London and call on BLM to honor the work, the struggles and the experiences of those who have been fighting for so many years and instead support the LGBT2Q+ BIPOC community by ending their partnership with Pride London Festival. We urge BLM to actually engage with LGBT2Q+ BIPOC community, and make transparent the terms of their partnership with Pride London and if they have spoken to any other BIPOC LGBT2Q+ groups in London.

We urge Pride London Festival to stop positioning themselves in the false narrative of being inclusive and as a facilitator of diversity and conversations. To make public apologies that include examples of the very real harm they have caused and perpetuated and do the real work of anti-racism until there are no longer voices in our BIPOC community crying out in opposition to abuses and racism perpetrated by the board. We urge them to step down and step back from a conversation which has been taking place for years and acknowledge that in all of these conversations they have maintained a position that supports the LPS and attempting to shut down any BIPOC voice that speaks against them.

We urge our fellow BIPOC family who have recently been elected to the LPF board to no longer continue to enable the Festival's actions and to step down. We cannot continue to enable racist organizations any

longer. We acknowledge that within the LGBT2Q+ BIPOC community that not all of us have the same opinions and stances on the BLM movement and calls for action, but remind everyone that we are a community united and if even only one member of our community is hurting, it is our responsibility to come together to ensure that everyone is safe.

All Black Lives Matter including LGBT2Q+ Black Lives. We must use our power and what privilege we have for the advancement of equality.

The raising of the flag is a symbolic and performative action and the controversy that has erupted signals only how difficult it will be to create tangible change. We believe this issue to be a distraction from very real problems that our community faces.

Thank You

Black Queer Network - London Ontario