

Canadians for Genocide Education

Submission to Canadian Museum for Human Rights Round Table Discussion – Ottawa, June 11, 2009

Introduction

CANADIANS FOR GENOCIDE EDUCATION (CGE) is a coalition of almost 50 associations representing 27 different Canadian communities. We are dedicated to inclusivity and equity in education about and commemoration of violations of human rights in general and genocide in particular.

Twin Pillars of inclusivity and Equity

It is the opinion of the membership of Canadians for Genocide Education that any federally funded institution dedicated to human rights must be inclusive and equitable in all aspects of its treatment of the subject. Otherwise, it will be suggesting that a hierarchy of human suffering exists. More specifically, it would be suggesting that the suffering of some people is more important than the suffering of others. An institution that failed to dedicate itself to the twin pillars of inclusivity and equity would not be teaching Canadians about human rights but rather it would be teaching Canadians about racism.

CGE has been deeply concerned about the way in which this museum project was developed. It has been the product of backroom dealing by the Asper family. Such methodology has little to do with empowering civil society, human rights or Canadian values. The original publicised plans called for massively disproportionate space being allocated to one particular case study of genocide. This would have made inclusivity and equity in all aspects of the museum impossible. However, we acknowledge that much has changed from the early days of this project.

All cases (with the single exception discussed below) should be treated in accordance with the twin pillars of inclusivity and equity in all aspects. To help define what CGE means by its terms “inclusivity and equity” we have for the better part of a decade now repeatedly submitted the following five points to various branches of the Government of Canada and the museum planners.

1. The museum’s name, mandate and mission statement will be generic, inclusive and equitable,
2. The museum will not suggest that any one case of human suffering is more important than others by providing it with permanent strategic positioning, disproportionate display space, or other devices to focus special attention on it by visitors,

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3. The museum's displays, funding and support for research and publication will be weighted toward lesser-known cases of human rights abuses and genocide that have been historically marginalized or neglected so that those episodes may be fully recognized, documented and presented to Canadians,
4. The museum's governance and staffing will be inclusive and equitable. Its board of directors, officers and employees will reflect the full demographic diversity of Canada's peoples,
5. The museum will be fully independent of the Asper foundation, other corporations and institutions excepting the Government of Canada.

We continue to stand behind these five points and insist that they are not a menu from which the CMHR's Board may pick and choose items that pleases it.

We note with great appreciation the values detailed in section 1.3 in the CMHR's *Summary of Corporate Plan and Operating and Capitol Budgets for 2009-2010 to 2013-2014* which states,

The establishment of what is believed to be the world's first museum dedicated to the broad subject of human rights embodies Canada's commitment to a set of values associated with democracy, freedom, human rights and the rule of law. Organizational values such as objectivity, innovation, **equity and inclusiveness** must underpin all activities of the Museum so that its operations mirror and advance its mandate. The Museum's mandate and status as a national institution also confer a set of principles based on accountability and transparency, national accessibility and engagement, collaboration, corporate citizenship and sound research and scholarship.

This is an excellent statement that potentially satisfies CGE's concerns regarding this museum. If the CMHR is to succeed it will need the wide support of all Canadians. We hope to be able to whole heartedly support this museum.

Content of Museum

CGE does not promote or advocate for or against any one case of genocide (with one exception discussed below). Rather we simply insist on the full and unmitigated commitment to the "twin pillars" of "inclusivity and equity" in all aspects by the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Many of our members represent communities that include people that have been at opposite ends of the same case studies in genocide. We have encouraged our member associations to fully participate in the series of Round-Table discussions to promote their own individual case studies in genocide.

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In June 2000, Canada's Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage submitted its third report to Parliament on a private members bill to establish a crimes against humanity exhibit in the Museum of Civilization¹ (see attached). While not supporting, at that time, a "brick and mortar" institution it included the following statements which CGE continues to support.

The suggestion by the Canadian Museum of Civilization has led the Committee to propose that Heritage Canada consider entrusting one or more academic centres with the task of researching all genocides and crimes against humanity. This centre or these centres could collect material and publish works on genocide and crimes against humanity in the 20th century, as defined by the *Rome Statute* of the International Criminal Court, Part 2, Articles 6 and 7, to which Canada is a signatory.

The education of Canadians, and particularly Canadian youth, about the history and nature of genocide and crimes against humanity would be vital (sic) a vital objective of the centre or centres.

Ultimately, the CMHR should oversee or commission such research and make the material produced freely available to the public. The report also stated that,

The Committee was interested in the proposal...that a *Canadian Book of the Dead* be prepared to memorialize the victims of genocide and crimes against humanity. There are many traumatic events in the past of the peoples of Canada; not all of these tragedies, however, took place in the 20th century, and not all would meet the modern legal definition of genocide or crimes against humanity. The Committee is aware of the need for reconciliation among Canadians of different faiths and ethnic origins, in addition to the need for remembrance and knowledge. This need might be studied by the centre or centres proposed above.

The concept of a book of the dead affords an opportunity to inclusively and equitably recognize the victims of genocide. Of course such a mere mention is insufficient. This idea is submitted in addition to rather than as an alternative to other museum related research and commemoration programs.

First Nations and Inuit Gallery

The only notable exception to CGE's commitment to inclusivity and equity is the case study of the genocide of Canada's First Nations and Inuit. It is our position that the genocide of Canada's First Nations and Inuit is the only case of genocide that deserves special status in the CMHR as this genocide happened in Canada and is a defining aspect of all that Canada is today. Our prosperity is premised on the resources taken from and then

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¹ Subject-matter of Bill C-224, *An Act to establish by the beginning of the twenty-first century an exhibit in the Canadian Museum of Civilization to recognize the crimes against humanity as defined by the United Nations that have been perpetrated during the 20th century*

denied to our First Nations and Inuit. In addition, this human rights museum is to be built on their stolen land. It is CGE's position that the case study of the treatment of the First Nations and Inuit in what is today Canada is the only case that warrants a dedicated gallery.

Theme Based Galleries

With the exception of the case of Canada's First Nations and Inuit, all cases of genocide and human rights abuse should be addressed in theme based galleries. CGE further believes that Canadian cases may be handled in a separate gallery from international cases. However, again, all galleries within themselves should be inclusive and equitable in the examples they present.

CGE recommends that gallery themes regarding genocide could include:

- a) Social Engineering
- b) Ethnic Cleansing
- c) Total War
- d) Colonialism
- e) Slavery

Website

Most Canadians will never visit the actual museum because of its projected Winnipeg location. However, it will be universally accessible through the internet. All Canadians may know it and its works through its website.

CGE calls for the CMHR to develop a robust website giving the widest access to the museum's programming and resources initially in both of Canada's official languages. New material and case studies could be easily added over time. CGE further recommends that the website be developed over time into a multilingual format, initially to include the five official languages of the United Nations and adding other languages as resources allow. Such an approach will benefit Canadians and Canada's standing in the community of nations.

Classroom Material

There exists a critical need for a competent institution to produce material suitable for use in Canadian classrooms. In our schools today we have a proliferation of courses that focus on one or two cases of genocide. CGE has no concern about any case being taught fully in our classrooms. However, it should not be to the exclusion or marginalization of the many other equally valid narratives.

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CGE's member associations call on the CMHR to produce the widest possible downloadable selection of classroom ready material on an inclusive and equitable basis with a major emphasis on website accessible student and teacher educational packages. Cases of genocide, for example, should be downloadable from a menu of case studies.

This approach would facilitate Canada's standard teaching methodology that includes the comparing and contrasting of cases studies. Additional cases could be added over time as research continues. Physical space is limited. The internet offers perpetually wide open space for creativity. Still the museum should also do this work on an "inclusive and equitable" basis. As stated above research resources should focus more on lesser known cases so they may also be known by Canadians.

Participation and Support of Canadians

All Canadian communities will need to see that their narrative is included on an equitable and inclusive basis for them to support the CMHR. Without this support this project may only result in vast sums of money being expended to build a "white elephant on the Red River". The planned massive investment in a failed CMHR, at a time when human rights commissions and tribunals across Canada are chronically under funded, would be a cruel outcome indeed.

By working together and following the principles cited above we can build a CMHR that will genuinely serve all Canadians and that will have a transformative impact on humanity. CGE looks forward to your response to this submission and appreciates the CMHR's invitation to participate in these round table discussions.

Yours sincerely,



James Kafieh
Chair

Canadians for Genocide Education

Member Associations

November 20, 2009

Almae Matris Croaticae Alumni
Armenian General Benevolent Union
Armenian National Federation
Association of Serbian Women – Canada
Azerbaijan Cultural and Education Centre
Belarusan Canadian Alliance
Belarusan Canadian Coordinating Committee
Bosnian Islamic Association Gazi Husrev Beg
Buddhist Communities of Greater Toronto
Canadian Arab Federation
Canadian Cambodian Association of Ontario
Canadian Croatian Congress
Canadian Hungarian Federation
Canadian Islamic Congress
Canadian Tamil Congress
Canadian Ukrainian Immigrant Aid Society
Chinese Canadian National Council
Council of the Muslim Community of Canada
Cypriot Federation of Canada
Federation of Canadian Turkish Associations
German Canadian Congress
Hellenic Canadian Congress
Kurdish League Against Genocide
Latvian National Federation of Canada
League of Ukrainian Canadians
League of Ukrainian Canadian Women
Lithuanian Canadian Community
Macedonian Human Rights Movement International
National Alliance of Canadian Sikhs
National Association of Canadians With Origins in India
National Association of Pakistani Canadians
National Congress of Chinese Canadians
Niagara Palestinian Association
Not In Our Name (NION): Jewish Voices Against Israel's Wars
Palestine Heritage Canada
Pan African Movement of Canada
Roma Community and Advocacy Centre
Rwandese Canadian Association of Greater Toronto
Serbian National Shield Society of Canada
Slovenian National Federation
The Federation of Turkish Cypriot Associations of Canada
The Greater Toronto Kurdish House
Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association
Ukrainian Canadian Human Rights Society
Ukrainian Canadian Professional and Business Federation
Ukrainian National Federation of Canada
Ukrainian Women's Organization of Canada
United Macedonian Organization of Canada

Membership in CGE is open to all organizations that are dedicated to inclusivity and equity in education on genocide.



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CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
OTTAWA, CANADA
K1A 0A6

THIRD REPORT
OF
THE STANDING COMMITTEE
ON
CANADIAN HERITAGE

Subject-matter of Bill C-224, An Act to establish by the beginning of the twenty-first century an exhibit in the Canadian Museum of Civilization to recognize the crimes against humanity as defined by the United Nations that have been perpetrated during the 20th century

**Clifford Lincoln
Chair**

JUNE 2000

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Introduction

The 20th century was marred by horrific acts of genocide, innumerable crimes against humanity, and other atrocities. The Committee thanks Sarkis Assadourian, the member for Brampton Centre, for bringing up the question of recognizing the victims of these crimes against humanity, because it is only by learning from the tragedies of the past that we can hope to build a better future. The Committee also thanks those who submitted briefs and the witnesses who appeared to contribute their viewpoints and, in certain cases, their own life experiences of genocide and crimes against humanity.

Witnesses and briefs raised many issues about the most appropriate ways to remember the victims of genocide and crimes against humanity in the 20th century. Instead of a genocide exhibit in the Canadian Museum of Civilization, there was a general sentiment in favour of asking the federal government to establish an independent and free-standing museum. Two very different images of the proposed museum were presented: one would focus on the Holocaust and deal with other examples of genocide and crimes against humanity in this context; the other would treat all examples of genocide and crimes against humanity on an inclusive and equal basis. If a consensus emerged among all groups, it was that three central elements should be present in any project, whatever form it might take: research, education, and remembering the victims.

This consensus was emphasized in the presentation by the representatives of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, who made a suggestion about achieving the three objectives of this consensus. Their suggestion would reinforce the Canadian tradition which emphasises tolerance and reconciliation, and would avoid the disagreement over the form and content of a traditional museum might.

Remembering the victims

In World War II, Canadian soldiers liberated Westerbork in Holland, a transit camp from which Jewish and other victims of the Nazi genocide were sent to the infamous death camps, which were liberated by Soviet, British and United States forces. Throughout the 20th century, Canada became the refuge of millions of immigrants from all parts of the world who fled their homelands because of the reality and the fear of genocide, crimes against humanity, and other atrocities. Thus millions of Canadians have experienced first hand the horrors of crimes against humanity, or have relived these horrors through the accounts of their parents, grandparents and other family members. These accounts have become part of our common history.

Since the end of World War II, Canadian armed forces have become heavily involved in the United Nations peacekeeping operations. As a result, a growing number of serving members of the forces and veterans of peacekeeping missions, both civilian and military, have had first hand experience of crimes against humanity and genocide. Nothing in their experience of Canadian society had prepared them for the horrors they witnessed; even to-day, very little in their training will prepare them for experiences of this kind that they might have while serving abroad. This applies not only to service personnel, but also to the civilians who serve abroad to help restore justice systems, to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity, and to help non-governmental organizations care for victims and rebuild shattered local economies.

A Canadian way of reaching consensus

The suggestion by the Canadian Museum of Civilization has led the Committee to propose that Heritage Canada consider entrusting one or more academic centres with the task of researching all genocides and crimes against humanity. This centre or these centres could collect material and publish works on genocide and crimes against humanity in the 20th century, as defined by the *Rome Statute* of the International Criminal Court, Part 2, Articles 6 and 7, to which Canada is a signatory.

The education of Canadians, and particularly Canadian youth, about the history and nature of genocide and crimes against humanity would be vital a vital objective of the centre or centres.

The importance of education

The witnesses agreed that Canadians of all ages and in all walks of life should have access to education about genocide and crimes against humanity in the 20th century. Education would bring awareness: awareness of the depths to which otherwise ordinary, law-abiding people could sink, and awareness of the crimes they could commit. Education would bring knowledge of the extent of crimes against humanity and of the steps that can lead to outright genocide: from pervasive social bias to legalized exclusion; from state sanctioned removal of human rights to dehumanization; and from "ethnic cleansing" to systematic mass murder as an open government policy designed to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such.

The ultimate objective of education should be to promote respect for human rights, tolerance of differences, and abhorrence of discrimination and its manifestations, in order to prevent the latter from being transmitted from one generation to another.

Recognition

The Committee was interested in the proposal by the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association that a *Canadian Book of the Dead* be prepared to memorialize the victims of genocide and crimes against humanity. There are many traumatic events in the past of the peoples of Canada; not all of these tragedies, however, took place in the 20th century, and not all would meet the modern legal definition of genocide or crimes against humanity.

The Committee is aware of the need for reconciliation among Canadians of different faiths and ethnic origins, in addition to the need for remembrance and knowledge. This need might be studied by the centre or centres proposed above.

Conclusion

Many witnesses expressed their appreciation of Bill C-224, considering it an excellent starting point. In this spirit, the Committee has suggested some ways to pursue the Bill's objectives of research, education, and remembering the victims of genocide and crimes against humanity.

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage (*Meetings Nos. 37, 38, 40 and 41, which includes this report*) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted.

Clifford Lincoln, M.P., Lac St-Louis
Chair