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OPEN LETTER

December 22, 2009

The Hon. Jason Kenney
Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism
325 East Block, House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
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Re: Politicizing and Denial of State Funding to KAIROS

Dear Minister Kenney:

CUPE Local 3907 would like to register its grave displeasure with your administration's denial of funding to KAIROS. This partisan and electorally calculating act is a very open and dangerous development in the federal government's relationship with civil society organizations that it funds. One would have expected that a government supposedly committed to liberal democracy would unreservedly contribute to the capacity of charitable and public interest groups to speak out on matters related to public policies and human rights.

Furthermore, the baseless accusation of anti-Semitism being leveled against KAIROS as justification for taking away its Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funding is beyond the pale. A functioning and substantive democratic culture needs an atmosphere wherein a wide range of point-of-views is allowed to germinate and grow. This state of affairs may serve as a check on authoritarian or unfair exercise of power by governments or powerful elite groups. KAIROS's domestic and international work epitomizes the value and practice of being our sisters' keeper through its mission of building awareness in society of social oppression as well as enabling the socially afflicted to speak for themselves.

The Conservative government in Ottawa is now developing a clear pattern of taking away funding from groups with whom it disagrees or fostering self-censorship among those who rely on federal dollars to keep their programmes afloat. In the 2008 federal election, environmental groups were unusually quite on the Conservative Party's environmental policy propositions, which were weak and inconsistent with what is needed to achieve ecological sanity. Many

observers and commentators linked that silence or lack of public criticism of the Conservative Party's election platform to the fear of funding withdrawal. It is difficult for CUPE Local 3907 to not give credence to that perspective in light of the recent example that was made of the Canadian Arab Federation (CAF).

Canadians of good conscience need to raise their concern about and opposition to this undesirable breach of elementary principle of justice and the execution of political reprisal against KAIROS for its act of speaking out against human rights violations. It is fundamentally unfair to use the collective resources (taxes) of the citizenry to purchase civil society organizations' silence on human rights abuses by friendly governments, or even the federal government's actions that do not meet the test of justice, fairness and moral and political probity.

CUPE Local 3907 is calling for the restoration of funding to KAIROS so that it may carry on its worthwhile and laudible activities at home and abroad. Furthermore, the federal government must end its practice of punishing groups that do not agree with its policies, create public embarrassment for friendly regimes overseas and/or limit the parameter in which its allies may wantonly effect human rights abuses. Silence is not an option for those of us who believe in exercising the preferential option for the voiceless and the oppressed.

Sincerely,

Ajamu Nangwaya
Chair Internal

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