



PRESS RELEASE

MINORITY ARTS ORGANIZATIONS DENOUNCE SYSTEMIC RACISM IN QUEBEC CULTURAL FUNDING

For Immediate Release

Montréal, October 4, 2017 – By cutting and freezing funding for many minority arts organizations in Montreal recently, the Quebec Arts and Letters Council may have engaged in systemic racism that will threaten these organizations' survival and subject racialized artists to great economic, cultural and social hardship.

At a press conference held today, several arts organizations working with artists from Asian, Black, Latin-American, Middle-Eastern and South Asian communities and serving the city's multiracial population, came together under the banner of the Network of Artists for Equity, to publicly denounce, for the first time, the Council (known in French as the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, or the CALQ), for its recent funding decisions that disproportionately affect them.

Some organizations, such as Teesri Duniya and Festival Accès Asie, were denied 100% of their funding. Others, such as Sinha Danse, experienced a cut ranging from 25% to 50% while organizations such as Black Theater Workshop and Zab Maboungou/Compagnie Danse Nyata Nyata, received 0% increase in funding. Other minority arts groups have stopped applying since they have often been turned down.

Reasons for the cuts vary. For some, despite being recognized and funded by the Canada Council and the Montreal Arts Council, the CALQ cites a "lack of professional quality" and governance issues.

"The time has come for minority arts organizations to claim our rightful place in the Quebec cultural landscape and it seems that the CALQ Action Plan on Cultural Diversity does not recognize this fact, which we have to vigorously denounce", stated Zab Maboungou, an internationally recognized dancer, choreographer, teacher, producer and the winner of the 2015 Cultural Diversity Prize in Dance accorded by the Montreal Arts Council.

Maboungou refers to the CALQ's 2016-2019 Action Plan on Cultural Diversity, which stresses an increase of access to funding for arts groups "from diversity" and an increase in the diversity of CALQ staff.

"Our two dance organizations, Sinha Danse and Zab Maboungou/Compagnie Danse Nyata Nyata, have together more than 25 years of professional presence and recognition by our patrons, government bodies, private foundations and others, but we both are today at the bottom of the CALQ funding ladder compared to white dance groups that have been working for less than a decade," stressed Roger Sinha, a nationally recognized dancer, choreographer, teacher, producer and the winner of the 2016 Cultural Diversity Prize in Dance.

For Teesri Duniya, the problem lies with funding criteria and how decisions are made.



“Some of the CALQ funding criteria need to be looked at more closely, because we can’t be recognized as being professional by federal and municipal arts councils while being deemed not professional enough by the provincial arts council,” said Rahul Varma, Artistic Director of Teesri Duniya Theater, which has staged numerous successful multiracial stage productions for more than twenty years.

“We often have the feeling of being treated as inferior, foreign and unprofessional because we deal with different Asian cultures, in a world of rising connections between Quebec and Asia, and in a city where the different Asian communities are growing,” noted Khosro Berahmandi, Artistic Director of Festival Accès Asie, whose funding application has been turned down entirely.

Some organizations have discussed with CRARR about the need for legal action against systemic racism in CALQ’s funding decisions.

“We will take a closer look at the composition of the CALQ board of directors, the staff and the juries,” said CRARR Executive Director Fo Niemi. “The selection of jury members, their racial and linguistic backgrounds and their competencies in assessing culturally diverse artistic works are pertinent indicators of systemic discrimination.

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