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## Did confusion lead Pride to ban Forces?

**PAUL MORSE**

The Hamilton Spectator

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Hamilton's Pride Festival says it banned the Canadian military this year because of its human rights violations around the world, including the native standoff in Caledonia.

Festival organizers were taken aback yesterday, though, to learn the standoff involved the Ontario Provincial Police, not the Canadian Forces.

"It was in terms of the (native) land claims and all that jazz that happened two years ago when military forces did come in and remove people from that land during the Caledonia standoff," said Emily Groom, co-chair of the Hamilton Pride Festival Inc., in a phone interview yesterday afternoon.

When it was pointed out Canadian soldiers were not at Caledonia, Groom said: "(Hamilton) Pride has every right not to affiliate with any institutions that perhaps are based on human rights concerns." Those include perceived violations in Afghanistan and Haiti, she said.

The decision has ignited a furious backlash within the gay community, with claims that it is contrary to gains since the military overturned its discriminatory policies against homosexuality in 1992.

"This is completely hypocritical," said David Towler, a human resources consultant who is gay. "The whole situation is just ridiculous."

The Canadian military has participated in the Hamilton festival for several years, marching in the parade and setting up recruiting booths.

Organizers say they banned the military from this year's festival, which ran June 6 to 15, because of a complaint from a new Canadian who feared the military because of previous persecution by soldiers. The decision was made at a private board meeting two months ago, Groom said.

"It was a temporary decision and only for this year until we can speak further with the community and with the military," said festival co-chair Joe Whelan.

A Department of National Defence spokesperson yesterday said DND was not able to comment at this time.

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