

MEDIA RELEASE

Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association
L'Association ukrainienne-canadienne des droits civils
Українське Канадське Товариство Захисту Громадянських Прав

P.O. Box 275, 3044 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M8X 2Y8
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“Stay out of the Debate” – UCCLA’s Reply

For Immediate Release: Ottawa (19 April 2011)

The Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association (UCCLA) was established in 1984 and continues to advocate for the interests of the Ukrainian Canadian community. For example, UCCLA took the lead in the successful campaign to secure redress for Canada’s first national internment operations, organized an international campaign aimed at having Walter Duranty’s Pulitzer Prize revoked, honoured Ukrainian Canadian heroes like the Victoria Cross recipient, Cpl. Filip Konowal, and has unveiled plaques and monuments across Canada and in England, Wales, France and Ukraine recognizing our Canadian veterans and those who told the truth about the genocidal Great Famine of 1932-1933, the *Holodomor*. We have accomplished all that as an entirely volunteer-based organization only because thousands of Ukrainian Canadians and others have donated generously in support of UCCLA’s various initiatives.

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) is a taxpayer-funded national institution being built in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Its proposed contents and governance became the subject of legitimate debate in Canada recently, echoing concerns that have been raised publicly over the course of the past decade.

UCCLA is not a member organization of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) although we share its principled opposition to how the CMHR’s contents are being developed and its concerns over the current membership of the museum’s board of trustees, a body whose composition remains largely unrepresentative of Canada’s multicultural society.

We have made our views on the CMHR known frankly and consistently, with due regard and civility toward those who hold differing opinions. We have not resorted to bullyboy tactics or name-calling in an attempt to silence those who do not share our perspectives. We therefore find the ‘open letter’ that calls for the silencing of Canadian voices in public discussions over the proposed contents and governance of a national museum nothing less than appalling. Needless to say we reject the anti-democratic stammering of its authors.

Working with Canadians for Genocide Education, and other supporters, the UCCLA commissioned a March 2011 Nanos Research poll (www.uccla.ca). Its results confirmed that an overwhelming majority of Canadians (60.3% from all regions, ages and voter groups) want one of the CMHR’s twelve galleries set aside for the inclusive, comparative and thematic treatment of genocide. Obviously, that hall must include the Holocaust (*Shoah*) as well as the many other crimes against humanity and genocides that have befouled human history.

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Most Canadians do not favour elevating the suffering of any group above all others in this publicly funded national museum. We offer no apology for sharing the majority viewpoint (unscientific surveys conducted by *The Winnipeg Free Press* & *The Globe and Mail* resulted in even more decisive majorities against preferential treatment for any group in this museum).

The recently manufactured outcry against UCCLA (and the UCC) surfaced only after these Nanos Research results were made public. Those now attempting the vilification of UCCLA are demonstrating a desperation borne out of having been forced to recognize that their biases find no significant support with the Canadian public.

The 'open letter' issued by a small group - mostly non-Canadians - scolded UCCLA and the UCC, claiming we do not want the Holocaust included in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and/or that we somehow wish to distract attention from the tragedy that befell the Jewish people and millions of others in the Second World War.

That allegation is deceitful and slanderous.

These same individuals claim that UCCLA and other groups somehow equate the *Holodomor* with the *Shoah*.

That is also untrue.

UCCLA believes that all 12 of the 12 zones in the CMHR should be thematic, comparative and inclusive. So while we want the *Holodomor*, arguably one of the greatest acts of genocide in 20th century European history, to be permanently included in the CMHR it belongs in a thematic gallery dealing with genocide, treated there along with the *Shoah* and other crimes against humanity. That's fair.

Some who want UCCLA censured have no expertise in 20th century European history. Others are well known for making unfounded allegations concerning the nature and behaviour of the Ukrainian nationalist movements of the 20th century, assertions serious scholars have dismissed as prejudicial. While academic debate on any historical issue is welcome, the insertion of allegations about 'who did what to whom and why' before, during and after the Second World War is off-point, a dodge. Still, given the *suggestio falsi* our detractors have broadcast we are obliged to add a few paragraphs on this issue.

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Wartime collaboration existed in occupied Ukraine but was hardly unique to Ukrainians. Indeed Ukraine lost more of its population under the Nazi and Soviet occupations than any other country in Europe. Most of the signatories of the 'open letter' should know that, being nationals of countries where there was far more support for anti-Semitism, fascist movements and the Nazis (and, in some cases, for the Soviets) than was ever the case in Ukraine. What is surprising is that amongst them are those who apparently want the world to believe that Stalin's crimes against humanity and war crimes are less worthy of memory or attention than those of Hitler. In contrast UCCLA recognizes that the Nazi and Communist regimes both murdered millions of people. We reject puerile attempts at trying to quantify such misery in an effort to craft a 'hierarchy of suffering.' We hallow the memory of all of the victims, equally.

Beginning in 1984, some current members of UCCLA were involved in dealing with a stoked-up dispute over the alleged presence of 'Nazi war criminals in Canada.' At that time (as members of the Civil Liberties Commission/Ukrainian Canadian Committee) our community's position was that any person found in Canada who committed a war crime or crime against humanity should be brought to trial in a criminal court, regardless of when or where or why, or who that individual might be – whether identified by ethnicity, gender, religious confession, 'race' or political ideology. We reaffirm our commitment to that position and wonder why any thinking person would find it objectionable. Regrettably, Communist war criminals were not then, nor have they since, been made the subject of any serious Canadian, Ukrainian or other international investigations, or trials, even though no credible scholar would disagree that millions of innocents died at the hands of Communist regimes, and not only in Europe. We want any and all war criminals brought to justice. Certainly UCCLA does not want any war criminals in Canada.

Here in Canada the bogus declaration that several eastern European communities had harboured 'Nazi war criminals' was conclusively refuted by a federal Commission on War Criminals, headed by Mr Justice Jules Deschênes, whose public report became available in 1986. Those who claimed (and some still do) that there were/are 'Nazi war criminals' in Canada were frustrated. So now they want to cement their calumnies into the halls of a publicly funded Canadian national museum. We shall resist. We also ask: why did these self-styled 'Nazi hunters' never actually name or provide real evidence to prove who these 'Nazi war criminals' in Canada are? We recall how their claims were considered and rejected by our courts. Why? – because they were utterly without evidentiary merit. These facts speak to an utter lack of credibility on the part of the organizations and individuals who provoked this controversy in the 1980s. Their tales are no more believable today and certainly have no place in an educational institution.

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Now that we have offered facts for the edification of these foreign and domestic censors let us ask them a question – why would the ‘Final Report of the Content Advisory Committee for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights’ (available at <http://humanrightsmuseum.ca/about-museum/corporate-governance/letter-stuart-murray>) make not a single reference to Stalin or Mao Tse Tung or deal seriously with the Crimes of Communism? Surely at least some of them are aware of the millions who suffered at the hands of various Communist regimes (even leaving out Stalin’s Ukrainian victims whose numbers you delight in discounting, repeatedly trying to make sure Ukraine’s total losses stay at ‘only’ (!) 3 or 4 million). Did any of them register a single word of protest against the partiality of the CMHR’s above-referenced ‘Final Report’? Answer: No.

Why?

We have no interest in contending with non-Canadians over the contents or governance of one of our national institutions, any more than we would expect any of them to give much attention or weight to what a few Canadians might want included in a German or Russian or Israeli or even a Ukrainian museum. How we spend our tax dollars, how a Canadian national museum is governed, and what should be in it are matters for Canadians to decide - our business, not theirs.

As for the few Canadians of Ukrainian heritage who endorsed this ‘open letter’ and wrote that UCCLA does not ‘speak’ for ‘their’ community, nor for them: well, we never claimed to. We actually do not know what ‘community’ they belong to. But we can see the company they keep and so we acknowledge that they do not stand with us. For such small mercies we are grateful.