



PRESS STATEMENT

On Fri. Oct. 27th, Praise Academy of Dance Barbados submitted an excerpt of SPEAK LIFE in the Barbados National Independence Festival of Creative Arts (NIFCA), a national competition in Barbados for young artistes and the piece was disqualified not on technical grounds but solely on content.

SPEAK LIFE is a theatrical production of a 15-year-old girl who struggles with her gender identity and finds her identity in God. The submission was written and expressed from a Biblical worldview and based on biological science.

Praise Academy of Dance, a registered premiere arts school in the Caribbean with affiliated schools in Jamaica and Trinidad, has contributed positively to the social change in the nation of Barbados for the last 22 years by producing dances and theatrical productions specifically dealing with various relevant social issues. They have received more than 55 NIFCA medals. Other awards have included Flame Awards for Dance Group of the Year in 2004, 2005 and 2006. In 2019, Praise Academy of Dance achieved 9 places in the CARIBBEAN REGION top 10 CXC CAPE results in Cinematic Arts and Dance at the CXC and CAPE levels.

A fundamental tenet on which the Company's work rests is that no one should be discriminated against because of their religious or moral beliefs, that no artiste, should be penalized for creating art that is consistent with their beliefs.

Referencing the court case involving Colorado web designer Lorie Smith in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the freedom of expression of conscience and free speech, Artistic Director Marcia Weekes expresses the concern that such a disqualification by the NIFCA panel of judges "may impact, if left unchecked, how we in Barbados and the Caribbean, express our faith on issues of gender and sexuality in the future." Mrs. Weekes also laments the moral injury that the children participating in the Speak Life production have suffered, having been subjected to a crisis of conscience, and are potentially exposed to experiencing emotional distress because of the disqualification.

In its verbal delivery of their decision to the Praise Academy of Dance leaders who were present on October 27th, 2023, the NIFCA panel of judges indicated that the production denounced a particular community, was not in good taste, identified a particular community and said that they are wrong; They also said that the piece was defamatory; the emotion behind the delivery of the piece was aggressive and that they were concerned that we (Praise Academy of Dance) are using children to promote discrimination.

In their formal notice of disqualification, the NCF quoted, as their basis of disqualification, Section 9 of the NIFCA regulations that states: *“if, during the process of the Competition, an entrant or any of his/her supporting team makes any gesture or utterance that exceeds the bounds of good taste (whether on, or off stage), the entrant may be disqualified from the Competition. The judges shall determine whether behaviour is indecent, obscene, and defamatory or in excess of the bounds of good taste.”*

It is unclear which exact aspects of the production are deemed to have contravened this particular regulation. The Praise Academy of Dance has issued a request to the NCF to provide explicit details of how the production is deemed to have violated this rule.

Praise Academy of Dance in alliance with Family Faith Freedom Barbados, Watch out my Children, the Spiritually Aware Group Inc, TT Response and other organizations (including non-faith-based entities) call on the NCF and Government to uphold and protect our unalienable rights of conscience and our constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom so that all artistes, persons and organizations (regardless of faith, sexual preference or religious persuasion) are able to freely exercise their fundamental rights of religion, speech and conscience.