

PLEASE POST AND DISTRIBUTE AS WIDELY AS POSSIBLE.

Following is an open letter sent to VanCity credit union in Vancouver. If you agree that their actions are discriminatory and outrageous, please let them know.

Email:

VanCity Board of Directors [board\\_directors@vancity.com](mailto:board_directors@vancity.com)

Phone/Fax:

VanCity Branch 17

Financial Services Manager Tel: 604-877-7171 or Branch Manager Tel: 604-877-7170

Fax: 604-877-7917

(Please c.c. the chair of the Vancity Community Foundation, Tim Louis [vcf@vancity.com](mailto:vcf@vancity.com), the body mandated "to develop relationships with .... immigrant/refugee groups".)

Hanna

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August 24, 2005

OPEN LETTER

Re: DISCRIMINATORY POLICIES OF VANCITY TOWARDS ARAB-CANADIANS

B.C. MARKET is a small business in New Westminster, a convenience and Arabic food store, which has banked for many years with VanCity Credit Union. However, on August 15, 2005, VanCity sent a letter to B.C. MARKET, informing us that they would be closing our accounts in a month, because they have "been unable to fully understand the nature of the business' revenue".

For the last year, they had intermittently been asking us for confidential financial information, which we diligently provided, even sending them a copy of our official business tax return. We sent a letter, detailing the nature of running a convenience store and how it entails handling a lot of cash. We told them, in that letter of June 23, 2004, that we were long-time credit union supporters and were disappointed with their behaviour towards a small community business. We also questioned if all of this harassment was not motivated by the fact that the business in question is owned by two people of Palestinian Arab descent. At the time, they denied any such intentions.

However, this new outrage, done in such a crude manner, has confirmed our suspicions that we are being targeted because of our racial origins. We are sure that our business activities are no different than any other convenience-type store and we are equally sure that we are being singled out due to anti-Arab hysteria by both our government and this financial institution. We are also sure that the fact that both owners are community activists and staunch supporters of Palestinian rights, and that B.C. MARKET has developed into an information hub about pro-Palestinian and anti-war activity, has only heightened the discrimination we are currently experiencing.

Consequently, we are most certainly closing our accounts at VanCity without delay, not just our business account but also any personal accounts. We are horrified that a credit union could behave in this arbitrary manner and we are calling on all progressive groups and individuals (trade unions, small businesses, church and community groups) to also close their accounts at VanCity and inform them why. We are also telling our broader community, both in Canada and internationally, about this situation, and asking them to terminate any dealings they may have with VanCity.

The Arab-Canadian community is becoming increasingly fed up with these kind of racist actions, be it police and security services harassment towards community members or financial discrimination towards small businesses. Regrettably, it seems Canada did not learn the painful lessons of wrongfully incarcerating the Japanese-Canadian community half a century ago, despite recent apologies to the contrary.

Hanna Kawas

Owner, B.C. MARKET

c.c. VanCity Board of Directors