

Statement of Stanford Faculty and Researchers
on the Petition for Divestment from Israel
March 4, 2015

At the February 19, 2015 Stanford Faculty Senate meeting President John Hennessy issued a statement regarding recent campus debates and the student senate vote on divestment from Israel. Most startling was his observation that “in the nearly 15 years that I have been president, and my 30 years here as a faculty member, I have never seen a topic that has been more divisive within the university community.”

The undersigned faculty shares the same impression and this distresses us greatly. And it is precisely the single-minded ferocity of this recent campaign, its inability to take in the larger tableaux of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict when focusing on one aspect of the dilemma that unsettles us still more than the student senate resolution it produced.

We share a wide range of views regarding Israel and Palestine, the Gaza war, the wisdom of current Israeli policy, and the efficacy of divestment as a political strategy. Included below are the signatures of faculty long engaged in peace efforts in Israel and Palestine, and many who have championed divestment as a strategy for addressing the environmental dangers of coal burning or, in years past, apartheid South Africa.

How to explain our discomfort with the singularly focused efforts leveled against Israel culminating in the student senate vote, a discomfort so acute that we have chosen to protest a student initiative? This might appear all the more discordant since the resolution’s final text, amended at the last moment after a contrary vote the previous week, is worded so as to avoid the sort of overarching condemnations of Israel that played so prominent a role in the effort culminating in the vote.

We do so because as we see it the campaign itself cannot be separated from the resolution, its intensity fueled not by disdain for Caterpillar or other companies cited in the resolution but by a one-sided condemnation of Israel. It is this campaign - and its capacity to focus campus-wide attention on Israel as a site of unprecedented oppression - that was as much, if not more so, the goal than the resolution itself. Its immediate impact, coupled with the divestment successes achieved recently on campuses elsewhere, will likely strengthen those forces in Israel inimical to Palestinian rights in the weeks before the upcoming Israeli March election. It will help ensure that Israelis feel ever more isolated, thus

undermining those in Israel and Palestine best capable of moving in the direction of peace.

The achievement of peace has been achingly slow, thwarted repeatedly -- as many of us see it -- by forces on both sides. If peace has a chance to succeed with the emergence of a workable democracy for Palestinians as well as Israelis, Jews and non-Jews, one-sided broadsides directed at Israel are certain to be more useless now than ever. Demanded is flexibility on all sides, a capacity to see beyond past wrongs however bruising, a willingness to look forwards -- not always and ever-suspiciously -- backwards.

The goal of our campus' recent anti-Israel campaign wasn't to open up discussion on these complex matters but to dictate simple, outright excoriation. In this respect divestment was less its goal than a tactic, a deceptively benign way to bring to fruition an anti-Israel resolution. Hence, the repeated reference in programs leading up to the vote linking Israel with the Ferguson tragedy, one of many efforts at collapsing Israel into whatever catastrophe felt pertinent, and readily accessible.

Israel deserves to be treated -- much like nearly all other states -- as a state worthy of criticism; the onslaught unleashed at Stanford suggests something far more overarching in its reach. There is real, overt and systematically murderous racism in the same part of the world in which Israel exists. This is leveled against Kurds, Yazidis, Copts, other Christians, Jews and both Shia and Sunni Moslems. We appreciate that human rights issues are often subjective. It's impossible to take in all of humanity's woes, and inevitably some will loom larger than others. But in the midst of the outright terror leveled against the groups mentioned above, the horrors championed by ISIS, the genocide of hundreds of thousands in Syria, the gunning down of free speech activists on the streets of Paris and Copenhagen -- and the killing of Jews in any delicatessen, school, or place of worship displaying a Jewish sign -- the simplicity of the recent Stanford campaign feels all the more off-kilter and disturbing.

Stanford is a place known for its creative intelligence, its agility in wrestling with the most intractable problems. Let's work toward recasting what has been in the last several months a singularly contentious campaign that has done little more than pitting one side of a longstanding geo-political dispute against the other. What we face here is a situation where neither side is altogether right or wrong but what is wrong is to seek to so besmirch one side of the dispute as to render its arguments mute, and irrelevant.

Signed,

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