

January 22, 2024

Dear President Johnson and the Board of Governors:

We, concerned faculty members at SFU, understand that some of our colleagues, in response to the current Israel-Hamas conflict, are pushing the university to divest from five companies that are alleged to support the Israel Defence Forces. We write to express our firm opposition to divestment **for political reasons**. (This letter is **not** a critique of the rationale provided for divestment, though some signatories would vigorously debate the assertions therein.)

The [BC University Act](#) stipulates that “a university must be non-sectarian and non-political in principle” (s. 66(1)). The divestment proposal, which is explicitly political, would violate this stipulation.

Equally importantly, institutional neutrality is critical for the health of our academic community. SFU must be a place where diverse perspectives can flourish; political statements by the administration create a chilling effect on such diversity. Specifically, those who disagree with the administration’s political position may feel uncomfortable about sharing their views publicly for fear of retribution. Moreover, prospective faculty members and students with dissenting views may decide not to apply to SFU out of a belief that they would be unwelcome. Other institutions, such as [Laurentian University](#), [University of Chicago](#), [Vanderbilt University](#), and [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#), recognizing the seriousness of these implications, have adopted policies on institutional neutrality.

We request that SFU follow suit and adopt a policy on institutional neutrality (such as the [Kalven Report](#)) immediately. We also request that the administration send a clear message to the SFU community that the university will not take an official position on any political issue that is not directly connected with the university specifically or higher education in general. Lastly, we request that you make it clear that the university will no longer base investment decisions on political considerations.

Sincerely,