

## **Oppose "Resolution on ALA Divestment from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions"**

As librarians and proud members of the ALA, we are deeply committed to the *Core Values of Librarianship*, including our obligation to social responsibility. As professional librarians, we also share a commitment to the promotion and improvement of library and information services. Accordingly, we strongly oppose the proposed *Resolution on ALA Divestment from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions*, which fails to advance these principles by serving as a vehicle for misinformation services, offering flawed information and a lack of context in order to advance a political agenda within the ALA.

We urge ALA Council members to reject the proposed *Resolution on ALA Divestment from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions* as it:

- Misrepresents Divestment as a Tool that Can Bring About Peace
- Overlooks Key Facts and Context Without Conducting the Research Expected of Professional Librarians
- Is Biased, Discriminatory and Unhelpful

### **Misrepresents Divestment as a Tool that Can Bring About Peace**

The proposed resolution asserts that supporting divestment from companies doing business with Israel is in accordance with the ALA's values and can be used to overcome "obstacles to economic and social development and the attainment of peace and justice in the Middle East." In reality however, economic leverages, although nonviolent, would diminish rather than enhance the chances of peace. Divestment focuses only on pressuring Israel and thus leads to polarization, divisiveness and invigorates extreme elements that are alienating to both sides.

This is because divestment takes a one-sided view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel is certainly not blameless in this conflict, but divestment attributes sole blame to Israel and fails to acknowledge Palestinian responsibility for the current impasse, including indiscriminate terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians, or the Palestinian leadership's rejection of multiple offers for statehood. For instance, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak accepted President Bill Clinton's peace plan, but Yasser Arafat did not and instead unleashed a wave of violence. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon withdrew from 100% of Gaza and since then, 9,000 missiles have been launched at Israeli civilians from Gaza. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert offered even more, including 98% of the West Bank, but President Mahmoud Abbas again refused to accept Israel's offer for peace. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has also accepted the two-state solution and said Israel would make difficult choices for an agreement. We are all aware of the problems on the Israeli side, but it's too simplistic to just boycott one side when both sides share responsibility for a complex conflict.

Rather, peace for both Israelis and Palestinians depends on both parties working together towards a negotiated, mutually agreeable solution. Divestment undermines constructive efforts to bring Israeli and Palestinian scholars together on joint projects, including those that foster reconciliation and promote understanding and trust. Rather than vilifying one side in a complicated conflict, we should be encouraging coexistence and a two-state solution, which is the recognized goal of not only Israel and the United States, but the Middle East Quartet made up of the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and Russia.

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## **Overlooks Key Facts and Context Without Conducting the Research Expected of Professional Librarians**

The divestment resolution likens the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the completely dissimilar situation of Apartheid-era South Africa. South Africa under apartheid was a state sanctioned system of racial separation and discrimination that dominated nearly every aspect of daily life. This is not even remotely the case in Israel, where there is one law for all citizens and minorities have full political rights enshrined in the legal system. The situation in the West Bank is also not comparable and must be viewed within the context of the very real security dilemmas Israelis face. Check points, security roads, identification cards and security barriers provide physical security from the very real threat of terror attacks. A balance is required to ensure security for Israelis, while working to ease pressure on Palestinians. Rather than misusing the concept of ‘apartheid,’ critics should instead look for means to work with people of goodwill on both sides to advance towards a negotiated two-state solution.

Additionally, the perspective of the targeted companies themselves has not been adequately shared and these assertions are full of inaccuracies or partial information. A few examples:

- Caterpillar has said that, under American law, it would face **civil and criminal penalties** for refusing to sell to Israel and potentially be banned from future government sales. Further, **even the Arab League investigated and rejected a boycott of Caterpillar** whose products are also used by Palestinians.
- Hewlett-Packard is widely recognized as one of the leading responsible companies in the world, ranking second on Newsweek’s “Green Rankings,” and listed in *Corporate Responsibility Magazine*’s Top 100 Corporate Citizens.
- The proposed resolution faults Hewlett-Packard with providing technology through a subsidiary in order to use biometric data to monitor the entry and exit of Palestinians into Israel. HP’s supply and maintenance of this smart card system is aimed at reducing friction between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers at barrier checkpoints while expediting the passage process. **It was developed and installed with support from the United States and the European Union pursuant to a 1998 agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.**

Unfortunately, the complex realities behind corporate engagement and use of these products have been misrepresented as intransigence and worse. We must exercise caution regarding these attempts that use American companies as a proxy to advance a politicized agenda in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## **Is Biased, Discriminatory and Unhelpful**

ALA Members should always strive to impart a positive, social impact, but focusing solely on Israel and excluding many other international issues is glaringly suspect. Members of the ALA have holdings in pension funds that cover a wide breadth of militarily and security-engaged companies around the world. Even within the United States, several publicly traded companies specializing in missile and drone technology, which have been responsible for hundreds of civilian deaths in Afghanistan and Pakistan, are involved in major pension fund holdings. This does not preclude Israel, or any other country, from addressing alleged unsavory practices, but ALA is hardly the appropriate forum for such a dialogue. More so, it is abundantly clear that not enough due diligence has been performed to make the overreaching allegations found in the resolution.

Rather than target American companies doing business in Israel in a divisive and inappropriate manner, we should ask what we, as ALA members, can do to promote peace. The answer is clear:

- Reconciliation – those seeking to foster peace should focus efforts on programs that advance reconciliation rather than actions that only serve to tear down either party. We should strive to help

one another see the conflict as the other sees it, by recognizing both narratives of both people. Further, we should teach and learn together, in support of the many meaningful coexistence programs that can better bolster these efforts.

- Promoting Solutions – we should encourage and support opportunities that create an atmosphere of economic and political cooperation, such as direct negotiations between the parties and initiatives that will boost the Palestinian economy and infrastructure. It is through these types of activities that we can help both Palestinians and Israelis move beyond the teachings of hate, to live side-by-side as neighbors in peace and security.

Socially responsible investment is an important duty. However, injecting a highly charged issue into the process of aligning investments with the ALA's mission and responsibilities requires added thought, discussion and reflection. Political conflicts should not be permitted to overtake our core values. The ALA membership deserves better than this, as do Palestinians and Israelis.