

CSG votes against divestment resolution

File not found.



The Michigan Daily

By Tanaz Ahmed, Daily Staff Reporter
and Lea Giotto, Daily Staff Reporter
Published March 31, 2015

After more than four hours of discussion and public comments, the University's Central Student Government voted to reject a resolution calling for the creation of an ad hoc committee to investigate the University's investments in companies that allegedly facilitate human rights violations against Palestinians.

The resolution failed to pass with a vote of 15 in favor and 25 opposed. There was one abstention. A roll call vote determined that the vote on the resolution would be public instead of a secret ballot.

The resolution asked for CSG to support the creation of a committee through the University's Board of Regents to examine the University's investments in four companies: Boeing Company, Caterpillar Inc., G4S and the United Technologies

[Compiled by the Faculty Action Network](#)

Corporation. The resolution claims these specific companies profit from violations of Palestinian human rights.

Hundreds of members of the University community packed the Rogel Ballroom in the Michigan Union on Tuesday evening to hear dozens of speakers express reasons to vote for or against the resolution. Similarly to [last year's CSG vote](#) on a similar resolution, attendees entered the meeting on a first-come, first-served basis and were given tickets once allowed into the room. Department of Public Safety and Security officers monitored the entire meeting from both inside and outside the room and officers organized a line for people to enter the meeting.

CSG speaker Christian Bashi, an LSA senior, said Multi-Ethnic Student Affairs staff was available outside the meeting room for students who felt they needed



The Michigan Daily

Students Allied for Freedom and Equality is the University's chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine, an organization that advocates for Palestinian solidarity across campuses. One of the group's main initiatives is promoting the Boycott, Divest and Sanctions movement. As defined by BDS, divestment calls for institutions to divest from companies involved in alleged violations of Palestinian human rights.

The meeting began with guest speaker Ali Abunimah, a Palestinian American journalist who writes for The Chicago Tribune and The Los Angeles Times, speaking in favor of the divestment resolution.

Abunimah called the situation in Palestine an emergency and said social change needs to occur. He said he did not believe a peace process is currently being discussed between Israel and Palestine.

"Just a few weeks ago, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was re-elected after publicly repudiating the two-state solution and saying he would never allow a Palestinian state on his watch," he said.

Abunimah compared divestment from the companies listed in the resolution to divestment for apartheid South Africa.

"We heard the argument divestment is divisive," he said. "But, who looks back now and says divestment in Africa was a mistake."

History Prof. Victor Lieberman, who currently teaches the course "The History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict," spoke against the divestment resolution. At last year's

meeting concerning a similar divestment resolution, Lieberman offered his recount of the history behind the conflict.

Lieberman said the resolution rested on untenable premises and the resolution assumes that Palestinians are solely innocent victims without responsibility for their own conditions. He also gave examples of conflicts in other nations with worse human rights records – such as Syria, Russia and India – that should be given increased attention.

“Israel has offered to recognize Arab sovereignty on five occasions,” Lieberman said. “If any of those offers had been accepted, there would be no refugees.

Lieberman did not directly speak against divestment last year, though in



The Michigan Daily

against Israel.

During the Community Concerns portion of the meeting, speakers were heard in random order. The speakers included students both for and against the resolution.

Community Concerns lasted 90 minutes instead of the usual 30 minutes due to CSG voting twice to extend the time limit.

Speakers in favor of the resolution spoke about how they believe there is consensus that human rights are a universal right. They also emphasized that the resolution did not call for CSG to make a decision on divestment, but rather to support a University committee investigating the University’s investments.

Speakers against the resolution discussed the perceived lack of consensus on campus on the alleged violations. They also spoke about the issue being a divisive subject on campus. Speakers urged students to focus on dialogue between groups instead.

During the Executive Communications portion of the meeting, CSG President Bobby Dishell, a Public Policy senior, as well a CSG Vice President Emily Lustig, an LSA senior, said they were against the resolution.

“This resolution in no way embodies or is in concert with the University’s mission statement,” Dishell said.

After the vote on the divestment resolution, LSA freshman Ean Seinfeld said he was pleased the resolution did not pass.

“I think the committee was created to investigate divestment would place the University in a conflict it does not belong,” Seinfeld said. “It’s easy to say human rights violations have been committed without knowing the root causes of them.”

LSA sophomore Danielle Rabie expressed disappointment at the outcome.

“In terms of the processing and the vote itself, I wasn’t particularly surprised because this University has never been inclusive of Palestinian students,” she said. “Although I was not surprised, I am extremely disappointed in CSG.”



The Michigan Daily

Last year, CSG initially [voted](#) to suspend the vote on the resolution indefinitely. This decision led to a [sit-in](#) at the CSG chambers. The following week former CSG President Michael Proppe, a current Business graduate student, motioned for the assembly to reexamine the resolution.

That year, CSG ultimately voted not to pass the resolution in a 25-9 vote with five abstentions. This year’s resolution received six more votes in favor over last year.

The University has only divested twice in the past. In the first instance, the University divested from apartheid South Africa due to the “serious moral or ethical questions” raised by the investments made in South Africa at that time.

In 1999, the University divested from tobacco companies because of their distorted advertising and presentation of health information.

After the meeting concluded, members of SAFE gathered around the Cube in Regents Plaza and thanked the supporters before disbanding for the evening.

Correction appended: This article has been updated to reflect the accurate vote count. The resolution failed with 25 votes opposed, not 29.

Clarification: The story has been updated to clarify Prof. Lieberman's remarks. The section now reflects Lieberman's statement that other conflicts and countries should not be given more attention than Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but that they should be given increased attention generally.