

Statement prepared by UBC Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights
Statement prepared for UBC Ombuds Office & AMS Council

The purpose of this statement is to affirm UBC Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights' (SPHR) commitment to see the call of the Boycott, Divest and Sanctions (BDS) Movement implemented by the Alma Mater Society at UBC. More specifically, SPHR affirms the phrasing of our referendum question, which reads as follows: "Do you support your student union (AMS) in boycotting products and divesting from companies that support Israeli war crimes, illegal occupation and the oppression of Palestinians?" We would like to see this question appear on this year's AMS election ballot so that the UBC student body may have the opportunity to register their collective opinion on BDS. A previous iteration of AMS Council, informed by the professional opinion of their own legal counsel, found this question to be in compliance with AMS procedures and guidelines, and thus as suitable for appearing on a previous academic year's election ballot; it is our hope that the current Council will give weight to this precedent.

SPHR believes that the current phrasing of this question is pursuant to AMS Code, Bylaws, and Policies. The question contains reference to specific terms and concepts with clearly-defined referents in international law. It also communicates, specifically, the actions being proposed. Furthermore, it is SPHR's position that the word "oppression," defined as prolonged cruel or unjust treatment, is neither equivocal nor ambiguous. SPHR has chosen to include the word "oppression" so that power dynamics and perspectives that are themselves not fully codified in the language of international law can be included. While opinions might differ on whether oppression is taking place, we believe that the word itself does not represent an ambiguity or imprecision.

We would like to further emphasize that our question does not, as phrased, make it immediately incumbent upon the AMS to break contract or sever contact with any firm that the AMS currently has or is pursuing business relations with. Rather, the question prompts UBC students for their opinion on potential AMS purchasing decisions. The purpose of inquiring into student opinion, we believe, is to provide student representatives with information pertinent to students' values and beliefs, thereby clarifying the direction that future AMS activity should take. As the constituting body of the AMS, UBC students should have a critical role in directing their representatives to act in a manner responsive and accountable to student interests.

The BDS movement itself grew out of a synchronicity of failings resulting from the ordinary ebb and flow of international negotiations surrounding Israeli-Palestinian relations. BDS is a movement dedicated to peaceful resistance, and the methods of resistance it calls for are entirely legal. Further, BDS represents an approach to addressing the Occupation of Palestinian Territories that is driven by speech and collective action. By making this question available to students come this year's election cycle, Council will do more than make a showing of its commitment to free speech, it will recognize the voice of Palestinian students on campus and the legitimacy of their struggle.

Sincerely,

UBC Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights