We, the Palestinian Youth Movement, stand with the UBC Divestment Coalition’s motion to divest from the following nine companies: Motorola Solutions Inc, General Mills Inc, Partner Communications Ltd, Bezeq the Israeli Telecommunications Corporation, Cellcom Israel Ltd, Bank Hapoalim BM, Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard and Lockheed Martin. These companies operate on internationally recognized illegal Israeli settlements.

The Divestment Coalition motion is a step forward in advancing justice for Palestinians. As an academic institution with extensive power, UBC can invest ethically and morally, and ensure endowment funds are not investing in companies that violate human rights.

The motion is an opportunity for UBC to follow in the footsteps of other leading Canadian academic institutions who supported divestment. In May 2021, the Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) passed a motion in solidarity with Palestinians. Just last month, the University of Toronto’s Student Union passed a motion mandating that it divest from “all firms complicit in the occupation of Palestinian Territory.”

For decades, Palestinians have described the condition of Israel’s colonial regime as amounting to the crime of apartheid. In January 2021, B’Tselem - the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights - issued a report which was followed by Human Rights Watch in April 2021 and Amnesty International in February 2022.

The movement for divestment is inspired by the movement that helped to end apartheid in South Africa. The late South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu - who received an honorary degree from the University of British Columbia - noted that the Palestinian experience reminded him of South Africa under apartheid and explicitly supported boycotts and divestment as a peaceful means of combating it.

In 1986, UBC supported this call against South African apartheid, made possible by the efforts of groups like “Students for a free Southern Africa.” UBC should therefore support a similar call for the boycott of companies complicit in Palestinian oppression.

Palestinian students on North American campuses have been campaigning for divestment for years but have historically been dehumanized, slandered, and often times ignored altogether. They are subject to smear campaigns by online dossiers, blacklists, censorship, and defamation, which has had detrimental effects that threaten their careers and harm their mental health.

During the dispossession and aerial bombardment in Jerusalem and Gaza in May 2021, the AMS did not publish a statement of support for Palestinian students, nor did it provide any mental health resources. Yet, just last month, UBC put out a statement in solidarity with Ukrainian students against the Russian invasion, providing them with resources. In order to advance human rights, UBC should exercise moral consistency, one that doesn’t exclude Palestinians.

UBC prides itself on being a global institution that encourages sustainability, political, and social engagement, one that champions student involvement in making the world a better place. Additionally, UBC has situated itself as a supporter of Indigenous rights here on Turtle Island and should continue to uphold calls for reconciliation. Palestinians and Indigenous people on
Turtle Island have shared history, one that displays anti-colonial solidarity for freedom, justice, and dignity.

It now has the opportunity to reverse the wrongdoings of the past by supporting students in their fight for social justice and pushing for ethical administrative practices. We therefore applaud this effort and call on UBC to support divestment. It is imperative that UBC heed the call for divestment and display its support for justice for all people.