

Petition for WWC to Divest From Israel

The ongoing illegal occupation of Palestine and genocide of Palestinian people have grown increasingly blatant since October 7th. Since 1948, Palestinians have faced dispossession and ethnic cleansing at the hands of Israel. Historically, Israel has refused to comply with international law and continually denies Palestinians their fundamental rights. Israel's current genocidal campaign in Gaza has killed over 34,000 people. This number often excludes Palestinians who have died as a result of starvation, disease, and the conditions Israel has created. This campaign extends to important infrastructure, such as completely or partially destroying every university in Gaza. On January 26, 2024, the United Nations International Court of Justice (ICJ) instructed Israel to cease genocidal acts and punish those involved, however, Israel has continued to escalate its genocidal campaign.

Israeli regime of settler colonialism, apartheid, and occupation over the Palestinian people is made possible through international support and corporate funding. The United States has given \$300 billion in total economic and military assistance, funding nearly 20% of Israel's military, and provides the political backing for its genocidal actions through propaganda and education based on misinformation. Despite the international recognition of Israel's actions as human rights violations in recent months and the ICJ's recent ruling, the United States has only increased its support of Israel. Why? Israel serves as an outpost for American oil interests in the Middle East. The American ruling class makes copious amounts of money from the exploitation of Palestinian people. Greg Hayes, CEO of Raytheon, when discussing the potential rise in missile orders due to Israel's current genocidal campaign, stated "I think really across the entire Raytheon portfolio, you're going to see a benefit of this restocking."

Since the ruling class refuses to act against this injustice, Palestinian civil society has called for a global citizens' response of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for freedom. We demand that Warren Wilson College positions itself on the right side of history by taking up this call to action. In 2005, the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement was launched by 170 Palestinian unions, refugee networks, women's organizations, professional associations, popular resistance committees, and other Palestinian civil society bodies to call for boycotts, divestments, and sanctions as a way for institutions to create non-violent pressure on Israel to end their genocidal campaign. Divestment campaigns specifically, are a means to urge institutions to withdraw investments from the State of Israel and all Israeli and international companies that sustain Israeli apartheid.

In 2015, a student-led campaign pushed Warren Wilson College to recognize a misalignment between its core values and investments, leading the school to become one of the roughly 25 U.S. colleges and universities to pledge to divest totally from fossil fuels within 5

years and to begin fully integrating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors into the investment process. By 2020, the college reached 100% divestment of its portfolio. As Warren Wilson College divested, new investments were made in companies that demonstrate commitment to environmental sustainability; community and economic development; social diversity in hiring; and transparency and accountability in corporate governance, among other traits. Due to these efforts WWC has established itself as a leader in environmental and social sustainability and has received several sustainability awards including Sierra Club's 2007-2019 "Cool School" award and a Gold STARS rating from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) in 2020.

However, Warren Wilson's endowment portfolio still includes companies that sustain Israeli apartheid such as Alphabet Inc., one of the world's largest IT companies that supplies surveillance services to the Israeli government and military that is known to discriminate against Palestinians. Additionally, Alphabet Inc. is working with another one of the school's active investments, Amazon, to develop a new cloud infrastructure for the Israeli government called Project Nimbus, one of the largest technology projects in Israel's history.

WWC recognizes that achieving sustainability requires a commitment to environmental responsibility and social and economic equity. Can we pride ourselves as leaders in environmental and social sustainability when we are financially sustaining an ongoing genocide? To reflect the values that brought us to Wilson as students, faculty, and alum, we demand the school:

1. Screen for and exclude companies that participate in Israeli human rights violations from their endowment portfolio.
2. Immediately divest from all arms companies.
3. Pledge to expand ESG standards for investments to include war manufacturing and corporations sponsoring Israeli apartheid within 5 years.

An increasing number of colleges and universities across the globe are choosing to be on the right side of history by divesting from the corporate-sponsored apartheid and have successfully done so.

The appeal of Warren Wilson College to students and staff comes from its divergence from traditional universities as student activism has shaped the college's commitment to environmental sustainability, social equity, and community engagement. A huge promise of this school is the value placed on student leadership and the accountability it generates to stay true to its core values that brought us here in the first place. The school's decision to partner with the

International Endowment Network to develop mission-aligned investment strategies when students demanded total divestment from all fossil fuel companies in 2015 proves this dedication.

As stated by the school's Responsible Investing Policy, the school has already successfully implemented strategies to:

- A. *Conduct Positive Screening to invest in companies and investments that demonstrate commitment to:*
 - 1. *environmental sustainability, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and sustainable forestry;*
 - 2. *community / economic development and/or investment, particularly in communities with minority or low-income Residents;*
 - 3. *social diversity in hiring, executives and boards with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation;*
 - 4. *transparency and accountability in corporate governance.*
- B. *Conduct Negative Screens to avoid investments in companies involved in the production and distribution of oil, gas, and other fossil fuels.*
- C. *Keep track and oversee separately managed investments and investments within the schools endowment portfolio on an annual basis to create active engagement.*
- D. *Engage in Shareholder advocacy to change corporate behavior to be more responsible, such as sponsoring shareholder resolutions and partnering with external organizations designed to advocate issues of corporate responsibility.*

To implement such strategies, the Investment Committee established an ESG advisory committee composed of students, faculty, staff, and administrators, to assist in reviewing the endowment fund's Responsible Investing Policy. These committees operate under guiding principle D); *We will work to continually enhance our effectiveness in implementing our responsible investment philosophy and practices.*

On an annual basis, the WWC Investment Committee provides a report showing the Responsible Investment Activities of the endowment portfolio that may be made

public at the discretion of the WWC Investment Committee, Board of Trustees, and Administration.

On an annual basis, the IC will review the Responsible Investment Policy to specifically assess: *“how well it is working; what progress towards goals have been made; how is the implementation working; what issues are we facing and need to address; what adjustments or revisions, if any, need to be made; has anything changed that requires the IC to make changes to the policy; are there new approaches to responsible investing that could be considered; are the policies consistent with the values, mission, and culture of WWC”*.

We demand the school utilize its already established pathways for ethical investing to implement the BDS movement's demands for divestment. As stated by the Responsible Investing Policies guiding principle F); *When institutional investors consider environmental, social and governance criteria, transparency about these processes increases their effects on social and environmental outcomes*. We demand transparency about the school's endowment portfolio contributions to Israeli apartheid and the annual review of the effectiveness of the Responsible Investment Policy.

WWC's values, mission, and culture attract a student body that strives to be leaders in supporting peace and global well-being. We don't want our tuition dollars invested in companies that profit from war crimes and don't want our education to be funded by profits generated by human rights violations. Divestment pressures corporations to end their involvement in Israeli human rights violations because it makes humanitarian injustice less profitable. Divestment campaigns also help educate communities about the Palestinian struggle, which aligns with WWC's mission to produce globally-minded graduates empowered to be active citizens.