

TGSA Extraordinary Board Meeting
Friday, May 24th 2024 @ 12:00 PM
Hybrid – TST/Zoom

Minutes

Present: Maureen O., Bohdan H., David R., Susan M., Matteo C., Marina G., Christian C-S, Hyelim Y., Sileen P.

Regrets: Rosemary B., Christine W. S.

Guests: John Sampson, Prof. Darren Dias

1. **Prayer/Territorial Acknowledgment.** A prayer was offered by John Sampson, following which Maureen read the Territorial Acknowledgement.
2. This meeting was called with the goal of finalizing the response of the TGSA Executive to the request made by the TST students who are involved with the Palestinian encampment. Over the past weeks Matteo in consultation with the other members of the TGSA executive has crafted a statement which currently reads as follows:

“Disclose! Divest!” is the chant student’s have used to call on universities across North America to disclose their financial investment to the public and divest from companies profiting from the war in Gaza. At the University of Toronto, students and faculty taking part in this protest movement are making specific demands of President Meric Gertler and the university's Board of Governors.

The Theology Graduate Student Association (TGSA) is an association of graduate students who study at colleges who have membership in, and are affiliated with the Toronto School of Theology (TST) at the University of Toronto. TST functions as an ecumenical consortium of Christian theological schools that welcomes students and scholarship from diverse faith traditions. As students and residents living and working at the University of Toronto we acknowledge that the land on which the University of Toronto operates is part of the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Mississaugas of the Credit, an Anishnaabe people, land covered by the Dish-with-One-Spoon wampum belt covenant.

In borrowing from the words and lived commitments of a member college of the Toronto School of Theology’s land acknowledgment we also acknowledge:

“...the stewardship of this land by First Nations, the continuing presence here of Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and the harm caused by colonialism. We commit ourselves to seeking a new and honourable relationship with the First Peoples of this land.”

TGSA understands our commitments to honour the land and heal from harms caused by colonialism on these lands and all lands. We applaud Columbia University-affiliated Union Theological Seminary for voting to divest from companies profiting from the war in Gaza. In so doing, we lend our support to students' demands for financial transparency and the refusal to fund genocide, genocidal violence, unjust aggression and the dehumanization of any people any where, any time, in any place. We hope that these demands will set a precedent leading to increased awareness of similar genocidal situations elsewhere in the world and to a more widespread divestment from any corporate support of genocide anywhere.

TGSA recognizes the horrific suffering of all those being subjected to violence, war, the destruction of their homes and communities, and the millions of refugees who have been forced to flee from their ancestral homelands. We prayerfully unite ourselves to them in their suffering and also in our calls for all oppression to cease. We pray that justice will ultimately triumph with the attainment of a just and sustainable peace for all those being subjected to illegal and immoral aggression throughout the world.

3. Maureen reviewed the genesis of the composition of the above document. During the following discussion the following points were raised.

Prof. Dias noted that:

A) it is good for theology students to be engaged politically. He also noted that theology students (mostly to his knowledge from Emmanuel) have reached out to offer pastoral care to those engaged in the occupation movement, which he regarded as very admirable.

B) that if TGSA will be making a statement in this (or in any other) matter TGSA should follow proper procedure in regard to motions, discussion, etc., and make sure that we are clear about what the voting threshold is to move this (or any other motion) forward. Is any given motion to be voted on only by the executive, or by the whole TST student body? Is the threshold for acceptance 50% + 1, two-thirds, three-quarters, other?

C) TGSA is a collective responsibility, and the statement that we make will be read by the TST, maybe by the U of T, and by our constituents. We should be cognizant of "who's in and who's out," i.e., be very aware that all statements should ideally be as inclusive of the TST student body as possible. We must also be attentive and sensitive to students who might either be made to feel unsafe or to be put off by any statement we might make.

Matteo noted that during the past days nothing seems to have changed in regard to the position of the U of T in this matter, and that TGSA consciously took a decision to make our statement as general as possible in regard to war and violence.

Marina raised a point in regard to the penultimate paragraph in regard to sentence order which was received positively.

Maureen raised the issue of how the statement will be shared. It was agreed that it would be posted on the TGSA web-site and on social media.

Hye-Lim suggested that we be very careful about referencing the actions of other universities in order that our position not be unreflectively associated with the particular political position of any other university.

On the basis of the above comments and observations small editorial changes were suggested and made collectively, and recorded by Matteo.

The final result of these editorial changes was presented by Matteo on the screen for everyone's perusal, following which two motions were made:

Whereas the TGSA executive received the following request from TST students who are involved with the encampment in support of the Palestinian victims of aggression: "We are . . . asking the TGSA to issue a statement that says the university should honour the demands for financial transparency and not fund genocide anywhere, anytime, in any place, against any people."

Be it moved that A: In response to this request the following statement be approved.

Moved by Susan/seconded by Matteo: Passed

And further, that this statement be shared publicly by the TGSA board.

Moved by Sileen/seconded by Hye-Lim. Passed.

4. Adjournment. Maureen thanked everyone for their participation, and reminded everyone that our AGM will be held next Friday, May 31st, at 12:30 PM. The meeting was adjourned at 1:02 PM.

Minutes prepared by Bohdan Hladio

Approved Text of the Statement:

"Disclose! Divest!" is the chant student's have used to call on universities across North America to disclose their financial investment to the public and divest from companies profiting from the war in Gaza. At the University of Toronto, students and faculty taking part in this protest movement are making specific demands of President Meric Gertler and the university's Board of Governors. We lend our support to students' demands for financial transparency and the refusal to fund genocide, genocidal violence, unjust aggression and the dehumanization of any people at any time and in any place.

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TO THE GOVERNING ELECT MEMBERS OF THE TORONTO SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY'S TORONTO GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION

We are writing to request that the TGSA issue a statement in support of the student-led actions demanding that the University of Toronto be transparent about — and divest from — its direct and indirect investment in companies arming or profiting from the genocide of Palestinian peoples. As you may or may not be aware, at 3am on May 2nd a group of U of T students joined the wave of student movements across the continent and began to peacefully occupy the green space of the King's College Circle on the St. George campus. They have renamed it "The People's Circle for Palestine." You will have likely received the institutional response in your email inboxes, none of which address the issue of profiting from genocide. At this time, we are not asking the TGSA to find consensus on religious or political beliefs regarding the history or ongoing events in Palestine/Israel. While it remains an extremely worthwhile and important task for a theological school association to understand the need to speak back against Christian Zionism, its own connections to settler colonial violence, and to honour the voices and experiences of Palestinian Christian theologians, we are aware that such work will not happen over night. We are instead asking the TGSA to issue a statement that says the university should honour the demands for financial transparency and not fund genocide anywhere, anytime, in any place, against any people. We would be happy to dialogue further about this request and would also offer support to draft something if helpful. We look forward to receiving your timely response.

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