

The PEARS Project: A Statement of Solidarity with Occupy UofT

The PEARS Project unequivocally supports the People's Circle for Palestine and the right of students to protest their tuition money being invested in genocide by the University of Toronto. We stand with Occupy UofT and join in demanding that the University of Toronto immediately disclose the investments that are funding this genocide and divest from these sources.

The University's decision to invoke the Toronto Police to clear the encampment is incredibly alarming to us. The Toronto Police have a long and well-known history of harming marginalized communities including racialized, queer, trans, and disabled communities. Many of those who are at the encampment are part of those marginalized communities, and they are being put at extreme risk with the police being called in. The heightened security surrounding the encampment has also been putting these marginalized communities at risk for weeks. Campus Safety and the Toronto Police Services are not here to keep us safe - they are there to protect the interests of the University administration and allow them to continue to invest in genocide. As a survivor organization, the University's decision to bring in the Toronto Police is also incredibly alarming as the Toronto Police have a long history of perpetuating gender-based violence.

We are also alarmed to still see the presence of Campus Safety at the encampment given that they are under investigation by UofT for sexual harassment, voyeurism, intentional sleep deprivation, denial of access to food, denial of access to ventilation, and restricted access to the press while students occupied Simcoe Hall¹. We are also incredibly concerned and disgusted at how UofT is choosing to insulate themselves from true accountability through having the investigation led by Marie Henein who defended Jian Ghomeshi against sexual assault charges in 2016². How can we trust that an investigation will be conducted properly when this is the person leading it? We demand that UofT that Campus Safety are not involved with the encampment until this investigation concludes and the organization has been held genuinely accountable. As an academic institution, which purports the right to academic freedom, the University of Toronto should understand the importance of protecting student autonomy, the right to assembly, freedom of press, and peaceful protest that is free from intimidation or state violence. This institution should not be attempting to intimidate students as a means of preventing them from using their Charter protected rights and freedoms. The University of Toronto is actively disregarding the safety and well being of their students by continuously and unjustifiably policing them and their speech.

For the University to see how police forces across Turtle Island have been invading encampments and brutalizing students and then call on the police to do the same to their students is a disgrace. Many of the campers are Palestinians themselves and have spent the last 9 months

¹ <https://www.instagram.com/p/C61Qv5lgBJt/?igsh=enRtN3gwcnVzcnF6>

² <https://www.instagram.com/p/C61Qv5lgBJt/?igsh=enRtN3gwcnVzcnF6>

and 76 years watching their families be murdered by Israel and the IOF. To call the cops on peaceful protestors, many of whom have undergone and are undergoing significant trauma, is unconscionable.

The way that the University has been blatantly lying and misrepresenting the encampment is disgusting. We have seen countless emails from the University claiming that the encampment is not peaceful (it is), pushing racist sentiments about the cultural practices many campers including Anishinaabe grandmothers, aunties, matriarchs, and firekeepers/Oshkaabaywis have graciously brought into the space, and claiming that the students do not have the right to peacefully protest in this manner. We encourage all to read the statement written by the First Nation People to Northern Turtle Island³. The University's determination to continue to invest in genocide is an embarrassment. We have seen thousands of UofT students, staff, faculty, alumni, and other community members share this same sentiment. The community demands divestment. The community demands support. We add our voices to those who have bravely spoken out about this.

As a survivor organization, we also feel it necessary to speak out against the atrocities being committed in Palestine by the IOF and Israel, calling attention to the long history of the IOF using sexual violence as a tactic of colonization and repression towards the Palestinian people. Since the Nakba in 1948, Palestinian women and people have recounted the use of sexual violence to invoke fear and flight⁴. There have been countless cases of sexual violence being used as a tactic of colonial violence in the decades since the Nakba; including against Palestinian men by Israeli authorities⁵ and against Palestinian women and children attempting to flee the genocide⁶. Sexual violence is also believed by many to be much more commonly used against Palestinian peoples, but their stories have frequently been silenced or erased. We believe and stand with all survivors of sexual violence.

We have unending compassion and gratitude for our Palestinian comrades and all of our comrades who have been participating in the encampment, standing in solidarity with Palestinian voices. Week after week, they have endured anti-Palestinian racism, Islamophobia, and many other types of violence from Zionist agitators and the University has done nothing to support them. Despite this, they continue to fight for the people of Palestine. They have shown bravery and courage that this University's administration could only dream of.

³ https://www.instagram.com/p/C7hPbKyATjt/?img_index=1

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<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0886109920978618#:~:text=Sexual%20violence%20was%20used%20in,force%2C%20fear%2C%20and%20flight>

⁵ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1016/j.rhm.2015.11.019>

⁶

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/israelopt-un-experts-appalled-reported-human-rights-violations-against>

We stand with you in grief, rage, and endless solidarity. We encourage all members of the UofT community to follow and engage with the organizers doing this important work, including:

[@occupyuoft](#)

[@torontostudentsforpalestine](#)

[@uoftalums4palestine](#)

[@watermeloncoalition](#)

To the University admin (particularly Meric, Sandy, Kelly, and Christine); You have chosen incomprehensible greed over the lives of Palestinians. This will never be forgotten.

We demand that the University of Toronto meet the demands of the occupation, they must disclose, divest, and terminate partnerships with Israeli academic institutions NOW. Not tomorrow, not in a few months, not in a few years - now. The lives of millions of Palestinians cannot wait for another working group.

Sincerely,
The PEARS Project

For those looking for resources at this time, we encourage you to explore the following:

[Stand with the Student Encampment! Email your representative](#)

[Full Report: UofT UTAM's Investments](#)

[Occupy UofT's Counter Offer to University Administration](#)

[All the Walls Will Fall: 2023 Palestinian Youth Movement Palestine Liberation Resource List](#)

[The PEARS Project Resource Guide](#)

For those who would like support in finding resources, please do not hesitate to reach out.