

Press Release
Friday, April 24, 2015
on behalf of BDS Earlham

For Immediate Release:

On April 22nd, following three weeks of deliberation, the Student Senate of Earlham College passed a resolution in support of divestment from companies directly involved in the Israeli Occupation of Palestine. The resolution, presented by Boycott Divestment Sanctions Earlham (BDS Earlham), calls for divestment from three major companies profiting from the Occupation: Motorola Solutions, Hewlett Packard, and Caterpillar.

This Senate Victory was a unique one. As opposed to a voting-based model, the Earlham Student Senate utilizes a consensus-based decision making model, which requires that all members of Senate feel comfortable moving forward with any decision. "Members of the Earlham Student Senate enter as trusted individuals who share the insights and expertise from the various groups or committees that they represent, which they then utilize to make decisions that will benefit the good of the whole, in this case the student body. The Student Senate agreed that passing the resolution was in line with Earlham's Principles and Practices as well as the mission of Earlham Student Government," said Laura Honsig, Clerk of the Senate.

"While the consensus process can be time consuming, we were happy that the Senate had the opportunity to deliberate on this important matter in a thorough and holistic manner, which gave space for all members of the Senate to express their views and ask questions," said senior Alex Cook, of BDS Earlham.

For Palestinians at Earlham, this decision means a great deal. Fadi Disouqui, a third-year student from Palestine and BDS member commented: "Earlham Student Senate passing the BDS resolution is just a minor step in what still needs to be done. However this minor step is the kind of step that brings hope to Palestinians in the pursuit of justice. Hope is essential for us and when we see many school's student bodies taking a stand, we can see the possibility of a much bigger demand for justice in Palestine."

Numerous student organizations came out to express their support and opinions including Black Ladies United at Earlham, the school's fossil fuel divestment campaign (ReInvestment), members of the Jewish Cultural Center, the Student Run Coffee Cooperative, and the Student Bike Cooperative. In the last two years, this campaign has cultivated a strong working relationship with numerous other student organizations and campaigns to foster an environment of support and solidarity among the student body. This spring, members of BDS Earlham, Students for Peace and Justice in Palestine, Black Men United, Black Ladies United at Earlham, Students for a Free Tibet Earlham, and the Sociedad de Estudiantes Latin@s (Latino Student Society) participated in a flash mob demonstrating the ways in which police

brutality and mass incarceration are used as a tool of control and oppression in various contexts. This evidence of broader student body support from such coalition work proved to be important for the Student Senate during their deliberation.

This decision on behalf of the Senate served as a decisive victory after numerous years of struggle. BDS Earlham approached the Student Senate on two separate occasions prior to this most recent presentation of the student resolution. In the interaction with the Senate in the spring of 2013, the Senate agreed to take a poll of students' opinions regarding divestment, and then agreed to hold an all-student meeting the following fall. However, in the fall the Senate chose to drop the meeting out of fear of not remaining "neutral" on a controversial issue.

This semester, Senate has demonstrated a willingness to take a stance on controversial issues. The Earlham Student Government co-presidents released a statement in explicit opposition to Indiana's recent Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the Student Senate endorsed a divestment resolution from Earlham's fossil fuel divestment campaign just a few weeks ago. BDS Earlham found this recent willingness to meaningfully engage beyond a discourse of neutrality to be an important precedent.

"Our support for the resolution stems from our continuous commitment to our school's mission and the Principles and Practices that guide Earlham's decision making process as inspired by the Quaker testimony. Earlham's Diversity Aspirations Vision Statement clearly states that, as a college community, 'we seek to promote the presence and voice of groups that have been historically oppressed.' Supporting the resolution is part of our attempt to live up to the values that shape who we are as a community," said Co-Presidents of Earlham Student Government, Claire Welsh and Hashem Abu-Sham'a.

Following this crucial victory, the campaign seeks to continue talks with the college's Socially Responsible Investment Advisory Committee, to continue to educate the student body, and to pressure the school's leadership to divest.

BDS member Lydia Jewett added, "We are optimistic about this victory. We are really proud of the work current students as well as alumni have done until now and feel confident that a sound endorsement from Earlham Student Government will have a meaningful impact on the way the College's administration, Board of Trustees, and Socially Responsible Investment Advisory Committee approach divestment. We are also excited to be the 21st college to have a Student Senate endorse divestment from Occupation of Palestine. We believe strongly that every small victory is impactful for the larger BDS movement."