

The Palestine Society of the University of Oxford

Submission to the Ethical Investment Representations Review Subcommittee

This paper comes in response to the accelerated University-wide review of the current prohibition on direct investments in companies manufacturing arms that are illegal under UK law (introduced in 2010) as well as investment in funds which invest primarily in such companies (introduced in 2021). The University decided to undertake this review in response to University-wide protest, specifically in response to the University's financial ties to the Israeli genocide of the Palestinian people of Gaza.

The Palestine Society has been involved in efforts to initiate a review of this kind for many years - our work has spanned many generations of students who have pressured the University over its support of Israeli apartheid and occupation. However, since the beginning of the genocide in October 2023, we have acted in coordination with facets of the University to usher in immediate change. In partnership with [Rhodes Scholars for Palestine](#), we sent a [petition](#) to the Vice-Chancellor's office, signed by over 2,000 members of the Oxford community, calling for the University to sever financial ties with arms manufacturing companies, among other demands. Throughout Michaelmas and Hillary terms of last year, members of our society met with the Vice-Chancellor's office as representatives of this petition. These conversations sparked no movement on the topic of investments, and the University's Administration never formally reached out to the Palestine Society to discuss the impact of the genocide on our members.

In May, the Palestine Society [formally endorsed](#) the Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P) solidarity encampment for Gaza. We fully stand behind the demands of OA4P and support the student representatives who met with members of the Vice-Chancellor's team for several months to push forward this EIRRS review. This review came from tireless advocacy from Palestinian students and staff, as well as their allies. Therefore, we believe that this review must take into account the specific context of the University of Oxford's relationship to Israel and the oppression of the Palestinian people.

Complicity in Genocide

The current basis for the University's ethical restrictions on investment in arms is guided by what is illegal according to UK law. The UK government is currently [participating](#) in crimes of genocide in Gaza, and the University of Oxford should have more stringent requirements for investments than the government as a result. The current ethical restrictions allow for the University of Oxford to invest in weapons manufacturing

companies, such as [Elbit Systems](#), which are supplying the Israeli state with arms to commit crimes against humanity. With each week that the University of Oxford continues to invest in these companies, it is [violating](#) the Genocide Convention.

Leading medical journal, [The Lancet](#), stated “it is not implausible to estimate that up to 186,000 or even more deaths could be attributable to the current conflict in Gaza.” This is equivalent to about 8% of the population of the Gaza Strip. The horrors committed by Israel in Gaza are impossible to translate into words. We have watched as Israel has implemented a [total siege](#) on the north of Gaza, starving anyone who remains. Israel is [restricting](#) 83% of all food aid entering Gaza, in what Oxfam has labeled “starvation as a weapon of genocide.” Israel [strikes](#) Palestinians as they queue for flour, [burns](#) people alive in refugee camps, and [shoots children](#) at [point blank](#) range. Meanwhile, the University of Oxford profits off the sale of the weapons used to perpetrate these crimes.

The Palestine Society serves as a student community for Palestinians at the University of Oxford, many of whom have lost their families, universities, schools, places of work, favourite restaurants, local parks, pets, and everything that composes a life and a home. By continuing to invest in weapons manufacturing companies and other financial entities supporting the Israeli apartheid state, the University of Oxford is directly contributing to this destruction. It is not an exaggeration to say that the University of Oxford is helping to maim, murder, and exterminate its own students and their families. Oxford is supporting actions [illegal](#) under international law, and actively contributing to the annihilation of the Palestinian people.

Complicity in Scholasticide

The University of Oxford has obligations as a global leader in education to prevent the targeted destruction of Palestinian scholarship. Instead, the University of Oxford has provided cover for the Israeli crime of scholasticide. The term “scholasticide” was first [coined](#) at the University of Oxford, by Palestinian scholar and Professor Karma Nabulsi. Nabulsi [defines](#) scholasticide as “the systematic destruction of Palestinian education by Israel”. Scholasticide is a critical part of genocidal logic because of the power of education to “posit possibilities, open horizons”, in contrast to “the apartheid wall, the shackling checkpoints, [and] the choking prisons”. Recognising “how important education is to the Palestinian tradition and the Palestinian revolution”, Nabulsi noted that Israeli colonial policymakers “cannot abide it and have to destroy it.”

The University of Oxford is aiding the policy of scholasticide by refusing to stand in solidarity with higher education in Gaza, and instead, choosing to fund the Israeli destruction of this key cultural sector of Palestinian life. Israel is [systematically destroying](#) education in Gaza, with [more than](#) 80% of schools damaged or destroyed.

The Emergency Committee for Higher Education in Gaza has [released a call](#) to academic institutions around the world, asking for support in resisting scholasticide and rebuilding Palestinian higher education. The Palestine Society urges the EIRRS subcommittee to take the first steps in heeding this call by ceasing our University's complicity in the destruction of higher education in Gaza. There can be no talk of rebuilding Gaza's universities while Israel continues to bomb them.

Recommendations

We echo the recommendations put forth to the EIRRS subcommittee by other constituencies within the University, such as the UCU and OA4P. We call for the following:

- Transparent investments and holdings
- A prohibition on investment in companies producing arms or military technologies
- A prohibition on investment in entities involved in apartheid, occupation, or genocide
- The expansion of EIRRS expertise to enable divestment from arms, military technologies and activity based prohibitions relating to apartheid, occupation, or genocide
- A requirement that EIRRS does not have any conflicts of interest with respect to any of the investment restrictions categories

In sum, prohibitions on investment in arms and weapons must extend beyond those that are 'illegal' in the UK or commercial definitions of 'controversial' weapons. We also argue for activity-based prohibitions for entities that are supporting or enacting apartheid, occupation, or genocide. The University of Oxford is an independent institution with a charitable mission and as such it must define its own ethical standards and take responsibility for their implementation. To facilitate these restrictions, we also argue that increased transparency over investments, expanded expertise on the EIRRS, and more careful consideration of conflicts of interest on the subcommittee are necessary.