

Faculty Letter Calling for Calvin University to Divest from the State of Israel and Gaza War Profiteers

Yesterday (Thursday, 29 February 2024), a group of faculty members from Calvin University submitted the following letter to the university's Interim President and Board of Trustees, calling for the institution to divest from any financial or programmatic links that benefit from the State of Israel's military actions in Gaza. I was one of the co-writers of the letter and am proud to stand by the statements herein:

Dear Interim President Elzinga and Members of the Board of Trustees,

We are a group of Calvin University faculty who are deeply concerned about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the Palestinian territories. We are writing to urge you to take a moral and courageous stand by divesting from any financial investments and activities that benefit from the State of Israel's military actions in Gaza.

As Reformed Christians, we believe that God calls us to [seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with him](#). We also believe that God loves all people and commands us to [love our neighbors as ourselves](#). We cannot remain silent or indifferent when our fellow image-bearers in Palestine are suffering from oppression, violence, and injustice.

The Situation in Gaza

The conditions in Gaza are dire and desperate. Since October 7, 2023, when Hamas carried out a horrendous attack that left well over a thousand innocents dead in Israel, the State of Israel responded with a siege and bombing campaign that is itself a catastrophe and that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians. Here are some of the shocking facts and figures that illustrate the magnitude of the crisis:

- As of February 22, 2024, [over 29,000 Palestinians have been killed](#) in Gaza with over 69,000 injured. Of these deaths, approximately 70% have been women and children. On December 25, 2023, [the New York Times reported](#) that a "conservative reading of the casualty figures reported from Gaza shows that the pace of death during Israel's campaign has few precedents in this century." At the time, the death rates were reported to be [1 out of 200](#) Gazans but that death rate has increased to [1 in 100](#) Gazans. It is estimated that [250 Palestinians are being killed per day](#).

- The [United Nations Relief and Works Agency \(UNRWA\) estimates](#) that over 75% of Gazans (1.7 million people) are internally displaced, many of whom have experienced multiple displacements since October of 2023. Rafah, which was the last safe city in the south of Gaza, is now under Israeli military assault despite [dire warnings of a humanitarian tragedy](#) if a military assault were to occur. Gazans have nowhere to find safety from Israel's military assault.
- The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) [analysis of Gaza in December of 2023](#) found that the entire population of Gaza is living with crisis or higher levels of hunger. One in four households—more than half a million people—face catastrophic conditions. Before October 7th, acute malnutrition in Gaza was almost non-existent. Today food insecurity is the norm.
- The Gazan health infrastructure has been systematically destroyed with only 12 of 36 hospitals running with marginal inpatient capacity. The [OCHA estimates](#) that over 370 attacks on the healthcare facilities have occurred in Gaza. The results have been devastating and catastrophic for Gazans.

International Condemnation

With few notable exceptions, the international community's response to the State of Israel's military actions in Gaza has been critical and condemnatory. Many countries, organizations, and individuals have called for an immediate ceasefire, humanitarian access, and respect for international law and human rights. Some have also advocated for sanctions, boycotts, or divestment from Israel. Here are just a few of these responses:

- The Republic of South Africa has initiated [proceedings against the State of Israel in the International Court of Justice](#), charging that "Israel, since 7 October 2023 in particular, has failed to prevent genocide and has failed to prosecute the direct and public incitement to genocide," and that "Israel has engaged in, is engaging in and risks further engaging in genocidal acts against the Palestinian people in Gaza." This case is currently before the court.
- The [United Nations](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), and [Oxfam](#) have all warned that starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is being used in Gaza. Starving civilians is illegal under International Humanitarian Law and in direct breach of [UNSC Resolution 2417](#).
- [Amnesty International and the International Court of Justice have observed](#) that Israel's blocking of urgently needed humanitarian assistance into Gaza breach the obligations of an occupying country under International Humanitarian Law, constituting war crimes.
- Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), an ecumenical coalition of more than 30 Church communions and organizations of which the Christian Reformed Church

is a member, submitted [a joint letter to US President Joe Biden](#) on February 13, urging him to “immediately call for a comprehensive permanent ceasefire, an end to the occupation, and lasting peace,” further adding that “We call on all parties to abide by the Geneva Conventions and customary international law and for the collective punishment imposed upon the civilians in Gaza to be brought to an immediate end.”

- The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), of which the Christian Reformed Church is also a member, has [issued a call](#) for “our member churches to stand in solidarity with all those who are suffering the ravages of war and call on the international community to work for justice in the region so that there can be a real and long-lasting possibility for peace.”

Our Request and Call to Action

We, the undersigned Calvin University faculty, believe that as a Christian institution that values justice, compassion, and stewardship, Calvin University has a moral responsibility to respond to the crisis in Gaza and to stand in solidarity with the oppressed and suffering people of Palestine. We believe that one of the ways that Calvin University can do so is by divesting from any financial investments and activities that benefit from the State of Israel’s military actions in Gaza.

- We, therefore, call upon the Board of Trustees not to allow Calvin University to support or invest in corporations or other entities that directly profit from the ongoing Israeli military operations that are laying Gazan life and society to waste.
- We propose that the Board of Trustees adopt a policy of selective divestment from companies that are involved in the production or supply of weapons, equipment, or services that are used by Israel to maintain the occupation, the blockade, or the war in Gaza.
- We also propose that the Board of Trustees require that the University refrain from entering into any academic or institutional partnerships or agreements with Israeli universities or organizations that are complicit in or supportive of the violation of Palestinian rights.

We understand that the issue of Israel and Palestine is complex and controversial, and we acknowledge that there are legitimate security concerns and historical grievances on both sides. States have every right to maintain the safety of their citizens, but when military operations are utilized as part of those rights, the state must adhere to international humanitarian law and the constraints of a just war. The State of Israel’s response to the atrocities perpetrated by Hamas on Israeli citizens in October of 2023 has flagrantly violated such international humanitarian law, as well as the constraints of a just war.

We believe that divestment is a peaceful and nonviolent way of expressing our disapproval of the State of Israel's actions, and of exerting economic and political pressure on the State of Israel to end its illegal and immoral policies and practices. We also believe that divestment is a way of showing our support and solidarity with the Palestinian people. We are inspired by the precedent set in October of 1985, when Calvin College divested from companies tied directly to South Africa in opposition to apartheid, and by the example of other universities and institutions that have divested from the State of Israel or from companies that support the State of Israel's occupation and oppression of Palestine.

The undersigned have varied opinions on what the ultimate solution for the Israeli/Palestinian conflict should look like, but we stand united against the atrocities occurring in Gaza today and so call for divestment.

The letter has 36 faculty signatures and an additional 5 staff members who asked to have their names added as well. I will not publicly release the names of these signatories but will let each decide for themselves whether or not they wish to have their support made public. I'll post updates on any response we receive, as well as developments regarding further campus community discussion.

Salaam!



[Darrell J. Rohl](#)

Professor of Archaeology, History, and Digital Humanities at Calvin University. Co-Director of the Umm Al-Jimal Archaeological Project, Jordan.