

# Why is divestment taking so long?

*An open letter – May 12, 2007*

As proud members of the MIT community, we care deeply about this Institution, its name and what it should represent. Thus, we feel compelled to express our grave concern by the Corporation's lack of response to the egregious Darfur genocide. We denounce the secretive and slow-motion way in which the issue of divestment is being handled.

More than three years of horrendous violence have passed. Hundreds of thousands of innocent people have been killed for no reason other than their ethnicity. Millions have been displaced from their land, their villages burnt to the ground, their water wells poisoned, their cattle killed. Their livelihoods having been stolen, the people of Darfur are condemned to life in refugee camps, powerless and frustrated, dependent on scarce international aid, and terrified of the surrounding violence. Women are raped if they venture outside of the refugee camps to simply collect firewood. Men are killed if they do the same. Children die of hunger, of thirst, or are murdered alongside their parents. And genocide is still going on as you read this, right now.

Harvard divested from Sudan more than two years ago, followed by over forty universities, including a who's who list of top-tier institutions. California and 11 other states have divested, too. But MIT has not. The ACSR ruminated the divestment decision for over half a year, including a three month recess. When it finally made its recommendation to the Corporation, it was kept behind closed doors, secret to this day. We cannot remember when the word Darfur was last in the lips of President Hockfield.

Why such lack of transparency? Why, when a huge part of the MIT community has already made it very clear that we care deeply about Darfur. Last year, we submitted a petition for divestment with over 500 signatures. Last year, we passed resolutions requesting divestment in our undergraduate and our graduate student organizations. We have incessantly published articles in The Tech requesting information and a prompt decision. We have mailed, called and stopped by the office of the President, Susan Hockfield, many times, including one massive visit in recent days.

This level of secrecy surrounding such a burning and clear-cut issue is, to put it mildly, troubling. We cannot understand why it is taking MIT so long to divest once and for all from the first genocide of this

century. The students, staff, faculty and alumni of MIT deserve better than this. We can't help but feel that those in charge of making this decision are not being representative of MIT's spirit. History is harsh on those who ignore genocide. We will be judged for not acting to stop Darfur. Let coming generations know that MIT's community worked to get an unresponsive Corporation to wake up. Let us be judged if we didn't push them hard enough.

Darfur is not a political issue: it is an ethical issue of the most basic nature. Killing innocent civilians is wrong. Raping girls and women is wrong. Burning villages is wrong. Destroying the livelihood of a people is wrong. What is going on in Darfur is as evil as it gets. An ethical issue cannot be more plain black and white than this. It is our duty, not only as members of this prestigious Institute, but as citizens of the world, and as human beings, to strongly denounce and condemn this atrocity and - at the very least - cut all links to those who fund it. We are long overdue in this duty.

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