



Thursday, February 17th, 2022

Statement RE: Implications of the Member-submitted Motion at the 2022 Special General Meeting

On February 16, the University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU) held a Special General Meeting (SGM) which included a member-submitted motion (a motion submitted by a general student member of the UTSU). It stated the following:

“BE IT RESOLVED THAT The UTSU wholly divest funds & further on forbid investment to firms complicit in the occupation of Palestinian Territory”.

This motion generated a substantial amount of discussion and post-meeting responses, including concerns regarding anti-Semitism and services to students. Of those who attended the SGM, which was open to all student members, the majority voted in favour. In executing this motion, and any approved motion, we will be following through on our commitment to represent our membership, the undergraduate students of the University of Toronto, St. George. We welcome the opportunity this motion provides us to further support Palestinian students on campus, and will do so in a manner that unequivocally condemns anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and systemic oppression in all its forms.

UTSU's Process for Member-Submitted Motions

According to the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act (CNCA), we are bound to place member-submitted motions on the agenda, and, accordingly, discuss and vote on it. As per our by-laws, any such motion is not to be altered in any form before our meeting as this would infringe on their rights as members. Including a motion on the agenda does not necessarily reflect the views of the UTSU but rather we are legally bound to consider such a motion by virtue of the CNCA and our by-laws. In this regard, we are also obligated to abide by the majority decision taken at the respective meeting. Indeed, this is ultimately the sole function of a student government - to represent the majority interests of the student body as determined in these proceedings.



The agenda of the SGM was finalized on January 26, 2022 and shared via the UTSU's [General Meetings page](#), where all information on the SGM was shared for students and the public to access. The Board of Directors was notified of the agenda, including the member-submitted motion, verbally in the meeting on January 30, 2022, and the agenda was shared again with all UTSU members on February 4, 2022 through [a post on the UTSU's official Instagram page](#).

Clarifying Impacts and Next Steps

We want to acknowledge the challenge of using a heavily structured meeting process such as Roberts' Rules to navigate a complex political issue on which students feel so strongly. We are committed to exploring ongoing opportunities for people who want to be heard on this and other issues of importance.

It was our intention to clarify through the SGM what precisely was meant by the terms used in the motion. Regrettably, there was not an opportunity to do so. It is, in other words, still a matter to be resolved, both internally and externally, through consultation with relevant stakeholders. Moving forward, the UTSU will meet with its Board of Directors to discuss in detail what this motion means practically for the Union. We will also commit to meeting with a range of campus groups with diverse viewpoints on this issue, to understand and research the implications of such a motion on students.

Nonetheless, even at this early stage we can make a number of unequivocal clarifications:

- We have heard clearly from a number of students their concern that this will affect the recognition of student groups. **It is against [University policy to withhold funding from student groups based on their ideology, assuming that they otherwise meet the UTSU's \[Code of Ethics, Code of Conduct, and People & Culture Policy\]\(#\)](#).** The policies against unwarranted withholding of funds have been put in place for good reason, and the UTSU will continue to abide by them.
- Further, we see it as our unconditional responsibility to uphold students' unmitigated access to goods and services according to their religion. This is a matter not only of human rights, but also a moral duty. Students can, therefore, rest assured that **the UTSU will continue to make Kosher foods** available at all of their events, and will advocate to ensure students are accommodated on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, or any other protected ground.



- Finally, it is critical to underscore whatever firms we choose to divest from is entirely at the discretion of the UTSU. This is an ongoing process of learning for our organization. We will employ a **consultative approach through the engagement of relevant stakeholders to understand how we proceed going forward** and report on how it can be implemented in a way that respects the human rights of all students at St. George campus.

UTSU's Stance on Equity and Social Justice Issues

The UTSU stands firm on supporting and raising awareness of equity and social justice across campus. We encourage and promote anti-oppression and continue to support students of marginalized identities. We remain committed to upholding the principles and parameters espoused by the University of Toronto, regarding the preservation and respect of human rights across the entire student population. As a student facing organization, it is our responsibility to remain **open, accessible and democratic** in the representation and advocacy of students' views. This can be incredibly challenging where conflicting perspectives prevail. However, we endeavor to balance freedom of speech and create a safe space for all members to engage in constructive dialogue. We reaffirm our statement below as per our [People & Culture Policy](#) that:

"The UTSU is committed to advancing the inclusion of faith-based groups while eliminating and addressing any forms of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, etc. within the UTSU and the campus community. The UTSU recognizes that these harms are exacerbated for individuals and communities who hold intersecting identities, resulting in unique forms of discrimination. Equity-seeking groups are therefore prioritized in the UTSU's mandate and advocacy work."

We will continue to follow our commitments by practicing our equity principles and take responsibility for any miscommunication and misinterpretations that may have offended our partnership with equity seeking groups on campus.

The UTSU does not support anti-Semitic rhetoric, practices and statements and will continue to work with groups to condemn racism, discrimination and exclusion on campus, including those working to combat anti-Semitism.



With this mind, the University of Toronto Students' Union strongly condemns and denounces any and all forms of discrimination, hate speech or attacks (physical or virtual) on any student arising from their religious, ethnic and sexual orientation. It is our vision to foster an inclusive environment where all students can have a positive and holistic experience whilst on campus; and any rhetoric alluding to the support of one group at the expense and safety of another is simply libelous.

We encourage students who have any questions or concerns or want further clarification to email communications@utsu.ca. We at the UTSU understand that this is not a discussion that ends today, and will commit to further conversations and education around anti-Semitism on campus and in our communities.

In service and solidarity,

The University of Toronto Students' Union