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President John Sexton
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Dear President Sexton,

As a member of your faculty, I write again on behalf of a still-expanding host of NYU students, faculty, alumni, parents, and other community members calling ourselves *NYU Divest: Go Fossil Free*. This time we want to thank you for arranging our meeting with NYU executives Mike Alfano, John Bradley, Martin Dorph, Alison Leary, and Ozgem Ornektekin. We were encouraged by our April 17th conversation about how our school can help lead the world away from worsening climate crisis and toward climate justice and Earth health by divesting from the fossil fuel industry. We appreciate the open door these administrators left for us to continue our discussion and their advice for forging ahead. This letter and addendum, also copied to them, are in consideration of this. We plan to talk further with the NYU Student Senators Council, including the IRHC, and the Faculty Senators Council early this Fall. We also are writing to ask you again for a conversation. We would like your support in bringing our appeal to the University Senate and NYU Board of Trustees. NYU Divest is eager to move forward on climate, adding fossil fuel divestment to NYU's ambitious portfolio of complementary sustainability measures.

In the weeks since NYU Divest's first meeting with NYU administrators, four intertwining understandings have become even clearer. The first is "that something that has never happened is happening," as I wrote in my first letter. Pressed by the unprecedented challenges of climate change, people with formerly fragmented interests—in waters, soils, wildlife, air, wilderness, human health, urban planning, and racial, ethnic, labor, economic, and every other sort of justice—are recognizing that in an interdependent world they share common ground. In the past few weeks alone I have seen more diverse ranks peacefully unite and swell in my classrooms and other academic settings, in our streets, across the country, expanding through a communications network of world societies. Unlike growth measured merely in ciphers, the growth of this coalition is fundamentally a matter of qualitative transformation. This emerging community, with deepening insight, understands that the same attitude of domination that causes one group of people to abuse another also has led some groups of people to dominate Earth harming everyone. Many are coming to see that this widespread, underlying attitude of domination and the actions and institutions based on it are the root of many ills and so must change, urgently. A community of intelligent compassion is evolving, encompassing the entire world-of-life.

Many people have already suffered super-storms and super-derechos, floods and droughts, heat waves and fires, and losses of homes, life ways, crops, and entire beloved species. We know with very high scientific certainty that the intensification and increasing frequency of such events is a consequence of ongoing climate change due to drastic and widespread human land-use changes, especially the rapid burning of fossils as fuels. This May, as I am sure you know, because of this, the atmosphere topped 400

ppm of carbon dioxide for the first time in some five million years with global average temperatures tracking right behind. There is plenty for all to grieve, fear and be angered by, particularly those least responsible for the causes. Alongside the many reasons for despair, however, people who discover that their special interest is ecologically interdependent with the interests of others receive a surprising gift. We find that we are not alone. We receive friendships with people we otherwise would never have met, fueling a resilient hope. This shared hope has nothing to do with lazy platitudes about everything coming out alright. It is already too late for that. The hope that I am talking about believes in the unfolding triumph of truth. It envisions a responsible humanity converging into a creative harmony with Earth out of which we humans evolved and to which we inescapably belong. Moreover, this hope rouses hard work and is catching on, inspiring greater hope.

The burgeoning fossil fuel divestment movement is part of this greater work of hope that integrates a diverse array of people supporting a diverse portfolio of complementary tactics, including everything from re-imagining storm- resilient shorelines to fashioning clean energy technologies to re-inventing human economies. This is a second thing that has become clearer in recent months. To free humanity's creative potential towards these possibilities we must unfasten the stubbornly dominating attitude of the fossil fuel industry, which we have allowed to yoke us into self-destructive activities. That we can choose to do so without losing our heads, as the 20th century American conservationist Aldo Leopold said, is "the saving grace of democracy." While it is crucial for people to reduce fossil fuel consumption, that alone is not sufficient to restore our joint liberty. The fossil fuel business is to put greenhouse gases into the air. The leaders of this industry, supported by leaders of world governments, are making immense amounts of money doing so. They don't want to stop. As long as citizens of the world allow this to continue, we all will lumber on, fettered into a system that is pulling the whole world-of-life to harm.

By way of illustration, take Rex Tillerson, CEO of Exxon-Mobil, the largest and most profitable U.S.-headquartered oil corporation. His salary topped \$40 million a year in April. It is unsurprising then to hear him admit, as he did a few weeks ago, that his "philosophy is to make money." "If I can drill and make money," Tillerson boasts, "then that's what I want to do." That company alone, with an annual profit in 2012 of \$44.9 billion, has reserves, which, if burned, would put over 40 more gigatons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. This would help push us rapidly toward the 565 gigaton threshold beyond which Earth will most certainly experience a cataclysmic 2 degree Celsius or greater rise in average temperature. Combine Exxon's stores with those of the rest of the fossil fuel industry and it adds up to a staggering 2,795 gigatons. Moreover, Exxon plans to spend \$37 billion a year through 2016 on capital and additional fossil fuel exploration. Other gas and oil companies are doing likewise. At the same time, flows of money link the wills of oil and gas companies with politicians. Billions of dollars in annual government subsidies support the fossil fuel industry. On its end, the industry donated \$8 million towards U.S. 2012 presidential campaigns alone and, so far in 2013, spent nearly \$36 million in U.S. political lobbying, with Exxon leading the client list. We can all recall how neither Obama nor Romney even mentioned climate change in their debates. In fact, at one point they bizarrely vied for recognition as most likely to increase fossil fuel extraction.*

Recognizing all of this, in just the past few months, six colleges and universities already have committed to divestment from the fossil fuel industry—from the Green Mountains to the Golden Gates. Over 300 other campuses—including NYU—have campaigns underway. With over one million members, the United Church of Christ has voted to divest, becoming the first national church to do so. Many other religious institutions also have campaigns in motion. Eleven cities—spanning North America, from Ithaca, New York to Madison, Wisconsin to Berkeley, California—have chosen to divest with efforts afoot in many more, including New York City. Rippling on, the Norwegian pension fund Storebrand and Holland-based Rabobank have decided to move away from fossil fuel investments, such as tar sands

* For references for this paragraph, please see addendum.

production. In past months, tens of thousands of people of diverse walks and special interests have rallied together peacefully in front of the White House, appealing to President Barack Obama to move us forward on climate. Along these lines, as we are sure that you know, the President, in his June 25 climate change speech, pledged to lead the way toward international cooperation to halt pollution of the atmosphere with greenhouse gases by everyone. While not breaching campaign financing, his new *Climate Action Plan* includes eliminating billions of dollars in fossil fuel industry subsidies in the U.S. and internationally. It spurs patriotic investments in clean energy. President Obama also is encouraging divestments from dirty kinds. “Invest. Divest,” he said in his speech, greeted with applause. Our generation will be judged by “crisis averted, in a planet preserved,” the president urged—“Can we imagine a more worthy goal?” He also urged citizens “to educate. Speak up for the facts....Broaden the circle of those who are willing to stand up for our future.” This is what our universities are about.

A third thing that has become increasingly clear is what it must mean today to be “a school of hope,” in the words of Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s *Hymn of the Universe*. As you keenly appreciate, President Sexton, to be a school of hope is to create a “sanctuary” for rigorous inquiry and free discourse. Emerging from the best of academic conversations, as you discuss in your 2010 “Global Network University Reflection,” you envision the evolution of a shared, complexifying consciousness that is mutually and creatively enriching to all participants. This is a consciousness, in other words, that helps us deepen our understanding that we are all in the world together. It is an understanding, as you quote Martin Luther King, Jr., that we are part of an inescapable web of mutuality—the very awareness we now see converging within a global community of compassion. In fact, significantly, it has been through processes of scholarly debate, criticism, and synthesis taking place within our own university and other research and educational institutions worldwide that humanity has gathered insights into the cultural milieus and scientific facts of global climate change. Moreover, a climate change planet is the increasingly fragile and tempestuous context in which all of our work and lives now inescapably unfold. For us New Yorkers Superstorm Sandy was a dramatic wake-up call. Perhaps more than any other, members of our global network university—reaching out across six continents—appreciate how embedded humanity is within Earth. With such insight comes responsibility. Protecting NYU’s core mission merges with doing service to the world beyond our sanctuary—a world of hope.

President Sexton, NYU Divest appreciates that under your leadership NYU has taken this responsibility seriously. NYU’s 2009 Climate Action Plan recognizes that global “sustainability is one of the underlying principles supporting the ability of NYU to achieve its mission and vision for the future.” NYU has been a “first responder” on climate issues in the past. NYU was an early signer of both Mayor Bloomberg’s sustainability challenges and the American College and University’s Presidents’ Climate Commitment. Swiftly putting our new cogeneration plant into operation, NYU met our initial goal of reducing greenhouse gases 30% by 2017, six years ahead of schedule. You recently announced plans to reduce emissions 50% by 2017, taking us half-way to our commitment of climate neutrality. This strong action anchors NYU’s overarching “climate-positive” ideal. According to our climate plan, we aspire not only to be “less bad” by reducing our own atmospheric pollution, but, beyond that, to leave a more healthy and just Earth community to future generations. We expect ourselves to model best practices—to discover new ideas, invent new technologies, and foster the “next generation of change leaders.” Those leaders are emerging, we must be proud to recognize. They are an honor to NYU.

Anyone perched near a park-facing window from the high floors of Bobst Library—where undergraduates Alyssa Evans, Ben Hammar, Sophie Lasoff, Costanza Maio, recent alumnus Steven Rasovsky, and I met with our NYU executives in April—could see gathered below a congregation of people. This creative event was organized by recent NYU alumnus Belinda Rodriguez, undergraduate Melanie Sluyter, and 1971 alumnus Catherine Skopic. Orange balloons in hand, viewed from afar, peoples’ bodies formed the symbol of a radiant sun while their voices were singing—“Life is around you and in you...let the sunshine in...” Singing, too, were white-throated sparrows and robins that morning

amidst blooming cherry trees as the light lengthened across the central concrete fountain. In their midst as well were members of a diverse coalition of NYC colleges and universities, faith groups, and other New Yorkers. As you write, quoting John Updike, in your *Baseball as a Road to God*, “distance brings proportion.” Sending our imaginations outward even farther, from the moon as our vantage point, we can reflect on the whole blue-green Earth as a cosmic oasis of evolving life. It is the sacred grounds of the freedom and justice for which multitudes have lived, suffered, and died. From Saturn, we see the tiny bright dot of Earth that is the sanctuary of NYU’s sanctuary, embedded in a solar system, embedded in one of more than one hundred billion galaxies—a universe of hope.

Like you, NYU’s emerging generation of “change leaders” is good at thinking big. In solidarity with others across the country our students have planned and participated in rigorous climate and fossil fuel divestment related research and public dialogues, speaking and listening to others. More than once they have shared platforms with widely respected climate author and activist Bill McKibben and climatologist James Hansen. NYU students also have been invited to discuss the role of divestment in promoting climate justice and Earth health with a diverse array of audiences within and outside of NYU, including fellow students and faculty, church groups, city politicians, gatherings of socialists, theater-goers, and all sorts of environmentalists to name a few. *NYU Divest: Go Fossil Free* was featured in an internationally screening film titled *Do the Math*. This movie is being shown widely as a tool for expanding the ongoing conversation about climate change responses. In the spirit of the “sanctuary” all of these events have fostered open communication among people who would likely not otherwise meet while encouraging the fundamental transformation I have been talking about—moving from a self-alienating attitude of domination to one of complex, world-embracing care.

The fourth thing that has become clearer since we last wrote to you, in conclusion, is that fossil fuel divestment makes sense for NYU. As we introduced our divestment appeal to you this past February and to our executives in April, we are asking the following of NYU, and you as its leader, with strengthening conviction:

- 1. To immediately freeze any new investment in fossil fuel companies.**
- 2. To divest from direct ownership and any comingled funds that include fossil fuel public equities and corporate bonds by 2017—specifically, from the top 200 publicly traded and government owned fossil fuel companies, which hold the vast majority of the world’s proven coal, oil, and gas reserves.**

You have written, President Sexton, in “The University as a Sanctuary,” that NYU must act “aggressively and with every means at our disposal” to safeguard our sanctuary for unbridled exploration, leading to deepening insights about “ourselves, our world and our place within it.” Out of that process we have discovered that, because of dominating human attitudes and greenhouse-gas-emitting activities—particularly burning fossil fuels—climate change is threatening the whole of Earth, thus also our university and its core, intergenerational mission. NYU’s Climate Action Plan recognizes that our core mission depends on global sustainability while the explicit job of our endowment is to support that core mission. Our endowment is, in fact, one of the “means at our disposal” to protect our global sanctuary. Fossil fuel divestment thus is not only an action of moral solidarity, binding us to a converging community of compassion moving forward on climate, it also is logical and prudent, helping release that community to do so for our own good. Fossil fuel divestment followed by re-investment in climate positive funds, moreover, is an act of big thinking leadership. It is still early enough in the game that NYU could be the first major research university—moreover, the first global network university—to commit to this right and courageous act.

As your mentor Father Thomas Berry put it presciently back in 1978 in his *New Story*:

From here on, the primary judgment of all human institutions, professions, programs, and activities will be determined to the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually-enhancing human-Earth relationship.

As NYU's leader and an innovator in the idea of a global network university, we are not asking you merely to make a political or social statement. We are asking—amidst the challenges of anthropogenic global climate change—that you do everything in your means—including divesting NYU's endowment from the fossil fuel industry—to foster a mutually-enhancing NYU-Earth relationship.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Julianne Lutz Warren

Master Teacher, Liberal Studies

With Costanza Maio (Global Liberal Studies '15), Gregg Badichek (CAS '12), and Sophie Lasoff (Gallatin '15)

For NYU Divest: Go Fossil Free

Attachment: [Addendum to Letter to John Sexton, August 1, 2013]

cc: Costanza Maio, Gregg Badichek, Sophie Lasoff, Michael Alfano, John Bradley, Martin Dorph, Alison Leary, Ozgem Ornektekin, Belinda Rodriguez, Catherine Skopic, Melanie Sluyter, *NYU Divest: Go Fossil Free*