

Office of the President
University of Toronto
27 King's College Circle, Room 206
Toronto ON
M5S 1A1

21st January 2016

Dear President Gertler,

The recommendations recently made by your Advisory Committee on Divestment from Fossil Fuels reinforce the implications of the COP21 Climate Conference in Paris: the fossil fuel era is over. We, the undersigned, support their well-researched stance that “fossil fuel firms engaging in activities that blatantly disregard the 1.5-degree threshold are engaging egregiously in socially injurious behaviour” (p.12), and their conclusion that the University should “divest from its direct holdings in such firms” (p.12). We urge you to accept their findings and immediately begin implementing their recommendations.

As the Committee acknowledges, the “crisis” (p.2) of climate change is already impacting the lives of millions of people worldwide, and future impacts “will disproportionately fall on students and generations of future students and children around the world” (p.2). Climate change and the fossil fuel industry endanger the health, livelihoods, and safety of peoples globally, but the danger is not one that is equally shared. People who are and will be disproportionately threatened by climate change are people from nations and communities that bear the least responsibility for it. Moreover, fossil fuel companies frequently violate the right of First Nations to give “free, prior and informed consent” as protected by the UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In the words of UofT alumna Keara Lightning, “Acknowledging the fossil fuel industry’s harm is especially timely after the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report. If Canadian institutions are serious about a process of reconciliation, a real first step can be cutting ties with fossil fuel companies directly tied to modern manifestations of colonialism.”

President Gertler, it is now your responsibility to uphold the University’s integrity by committing to fossil fuel divestment. You can choose to place the University squarely on the right side of history by signaling that it will no longer sit idly by and finance the degradation of our planet. Additionally, you can set a strong standard for accountability for the fossil fuel industry by making sure that the to-be-determined “method to evaluate whether a given fossil fuel company’s actions blatantly disregard the 1.5-degree threshold” (p.3) is sufficiently rigorous. The committee’s report provides several examples of behaviors that demonstrate obvious contempt for the 1.5 degree threshold stating that fossil fuel companies that are engaged in “non-conventional or aggressive extraction,” “distort science or public policy,” or “derive more than 10% of their revenue from coal” should be divested from immediately. Members of the student-run campaign for fossil fuel divestment have been working with experts from both inside and outside the University community to expand on the committee’s recommendations and craft a comprehensive method of evaluation. We, the undersigned, call on you to meet with

¹<http://www.arabellaadvisors.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Measuring-the-Growth-of-the-Divestment-Movement.pdf>

these students and consider their contribution to the implementation of the Committee's recommendation.

Worldwide, the divestment campaign is picking up speed. A recent report¹ by the American Arabella Advisors found that to date, more than 400 institutions and 2000 individuals from 43 countries have committed to divesting \$2.6 trillion (US) dollars of assets from the fossil fuel industry. At the University of Toronto, thousands of students, faculty members, eminent UofT alumni and public figures like Margaret Atwood, Jeff Rubin, David Suzuki, Naomi Klein, and Winona Laduke have voiced their support for the campaign. Most recently, more than 210 University of Toronto faculty members from 50 different departments signed an open letter imploring the University to drop all of its direct stock holdings in oil, coal, and gas and on October the 29th of last year, over 200 students, faculty and community members marched for fossil fuel divestment on the University of Toronto's St. George campus. We are writing this open letter to you as a reminder that the University's students, faculty and greater community urge you to join with them and choose divestment.

We, the undersigned, add our voices to those who have already endorsed by urgently presenting you with this open letter. By divesting, the University of Toronto can send a clear, strong message to Prime Minister Trudeau that climate change demands concrete action. The University of Toronto has an ethical, social, and fiscal responsibility to divest from fossil fuel companies and by divesting, it can be the leader in sustainability and justice it claims to be. President Gertler, this is your opportunity to ensure the University of Toronto does its part in shaping a safe and equitable future for its students. You must choose to divest.

Signed,
UofT350
Arts and Science Students' Union
St. Michael's College Student Union
UTSU Sustainability Commission
Victoria University Student's Administrative Council
Woodsworth College Student's Association
International Relations Society
Faculty of Music Undergraduate Association
Equity Studies Students' Union
Native Students Association
Graduate Geography and Planning Student Society
University of Toronto International Health Program
UofT Newman Catholic Students' Club
Juxtaposition Global Health magazine
International Relations Society
Oxfam University of Toronto
Veg Club (University of Toronto)
University of Toronto Environmental Action
LGBTOUT

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