

UNIVERSITY of  
**HOUSTON**

STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

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**Author(s):** Pres. Rizk, Chair Szell

**Sponsor(s):** Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), Ahlul Bayt Student Organization (ABSO), Muslim Business Student Association (MBSA), Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA), Muslim Student Association (MSA)

**Committee:** Administration and Finance

**Draft:** Final Read

**Removal of Starbucks and McDonalds from the University of Houston and the Creation of the Palestine Rights & Liberation Action Committee**

**Whereas,** the University of Houston continuously stands with marginalized communities during times of injustice;

**Whereas,** the University of Houston took immediate action after the death of George Floyd such as hosting thought leaders on race and inclusion and encouraging faculty and university organizations to engage in dialogue, as stated in a letter from President Renu Khator<sup>1</sup>;

**Whereas,** the state of Israel was created in 1948 through the forced expulsion and ethnic cleansing of over 750,000 Palestinians from over 400 towns and villages<sup>2</sup>;

**Whereas,** since 1948, Israel has routinely violated international law through the establishment of illegal, Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank by forcefully removing Palestinians from their homes and land<sup>3</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> [UH President: Confronting Racial Injustice](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Global Conflict Tracker: Israel-Palestine Conflict](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Amnesty.org: Chapter 3: Israeli Settlements and International Law](#)

**Whereas**, for the last 17 years, Israel has kept Gaza under a complete land, air, and sea blockade and siege, denying Palestinians access to food, water, shelter, life-saving medicine, and materials to rebuild their demolished homes;

**Whereas**, for 136 days, Israel, armed and funded by the United States, had murdered at least 28,858 Palestinians and injuring 68,667 more, constituting what over 800 scholars have accurately identified as genocide<sup>4</sup>;

**Whereas**, genocide is defined by the U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group”<sup>5</sup>;

**Whereas**, Israel defense minister Yoav Gallant promised a “complete siege” on Gaza and to cut off food, water, electricity, and fuel to the region<sup>6</sup>;

**Whereas**, Israel has “some of the most advanced military tools in the world, which it has aimed at predominantly civilian areas in Palestinian territories” instead of locating specific targets<sup>7</sup>;

**Whereas**, Israel destroyed all universities in Gaza, restricting education, and hospitals, restricting the ability to properly treat the wounded and assist pregnant women in births<sup>8</sup>;

**Whereas**, Israel is systematically and indiscriminately killing Palestinians, including children, women, and disabled people, in violation of international law and basic human rights<sup>9</sup>;

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<sup>4</sup> [Al Jazeera: Live Updates on the War on Gaza.](#)

<sup>5</sup> UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and AP: South Africa says Israel’s campaign in Gaza amounts to genocide. What can the UN do about it?

<sup>6</sup> [CNN: Israel defense minister orders 'complete siege' of Gaza, as Hamas threatens hostages](#)

<sup>7</sup> [CNBC: The cost of conflict through the years](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Human Rights Watch: Gaza: Unlawful Israeli Hospital Strikes Worsen Health Crisis](#) and [OCHA: Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel.](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Human Rights Watch: How Does International Humanitarian Law Apply in Israel and Gaza?](#)

**Whereas,** South Africa claimed in the International Court of Justice court case *South Africa v. Israel* that “the State of Israel: has breached and continues to breach its obligations under the Genocide Convention”<sup>10</sup>;

**Whereas,** the International Court of Justice declared that the government of Israel “shall take all measures within its power to prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to commit genocide in relation to members of the Palestinian group in the Gaza Strip”;

**Whereas,** the University of Houston has a well-documented history of funding and profiting from Israel’s bombing campaigns on Gaza;

**Whereas,** in 2022, the University of Houston’s Student Government Association passed a SGAR-58006, calling for the Board of Regents to withdraw its investments from companies complicit in apartheid, militarism, and human rights violations, including Boeing, Northrup Gruman, Lockheed Martin, and Raytheon, and other companies whose weapons are currently being used in Israel’s genocide on Gaza;

**Whereas,** SGAR-58006 similarly called for the establishment of a task force where students would research and establish a policy for Socially Responsible Investment in the university;

**Whereas,** neither of the above demands were met;

**Whereas,** the University of Houston maintains additional partnerships and contracts with companies that continue to do business with Israel during an ongoing genocide;

**Whereas,** McDonald’s Israel donated free meals to Israeli defense forces while Israel denied the entry of aid trucks which accumulated to conditions of famine as of February 18, 2024<sup>11</sup>;

**Whereas,** McDonald’s Malaysia filed a lawsuit against BDS Malaysia, an advocacy group supporting Palestinian liberation, accusing it of defamation<sup>12</sup>;

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<sup>10</sup> [South Africa v. Israel](#) and [AP: South Africa says Israel’s campaign in Gaza amounts to genocide. What can the UN do about it?](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Economic Times:Israel-Hamas War: McDonald’s faces backlash for providing free meals to Israeli soldiers](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Reuters: McDonald’s Malaysia sues Israel boycott movement for \\$1 million in damages](#)

**Whereas,** Starbucks sued its labor union for posting the words “Solidarity with Palestine,” violating its freedom of speech rights<sup>13</sup>;

**Whereas,** Starbucks is alleged to utilize slave labor and child labor in farms<sup>14</sup>;

**Whereas,** maintaining contracts with these companies constitutes a passive endorsement for their participation in and support for Israel’s illegal occupation and genocide in Palestine;

**Whereas,** Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) is a movement that utilizes consumer power to leverage collective power against Israel’s occupation;

**Whereas,** Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) calls for an international boycott of McDonald’s in order to apply targeted popular pressure for them to cease operations in Israel;

**Whereas,** ceasing operations in Israel would put pressure on Israel to end their illegal occupation and genocide in Palestine;

**Whereas,** the Student Government Association recognizes the ongoing targeted boycotts of on-campus companies like Starbucks and McDonald’s in order to pressure them to cease operations in Israel;

**Whereas,** multiple U.S. cities called for a ceasefire in Gaza, including Chicago<sup>15</sup>;

**Whereas,** Fort Bend County Judge KP George wrote a letter to President Joe Biden calling for a ceasefire in Gaza<sup>16</sup>;

**Whereas,** Houston City Council member Letitia Plummer wrote a letter to United States Representative Al Green calling for a ceasefire in Gaza<sup>17</sup>;

**Whereas,** there are various capacities that the student government can help support boycotts of companies and corporations that partner with the

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<sup>13</sup> [AP: Starbucks. Workers United union sue each other in standoff over pro-Palestinian social media post](#)

<sup>14</sup> [NBC: Starbucks sued for allegedly using coffee from farms with rights abuses while touting its ‘ethical’ sourcing](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Chicago is now the largest US city to call for a ceasefire](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Fort Bend County Judge KP George calls for ceasefire in Gaza](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Houston City Council member Letitia Plummer’s letter to US Representative Al Green calling for a ceasefire in Gaza](#)

University of Houston and have a history of support for Israel's occupation of Palestine;

**Therefore, be it enacted by the Senate of the Student Government Association of the University of Houston:**

That the Student Government Association renews its call for the Board of Regents to remove their investments from companies complicit in Israel's genocide on Gaza and all forms of militarism, apartheid, and endless war, first through the creation of a student-led task force and the establishment of a socially responsible investment screening in line with the recommendations of the task force.

**Be it further enacted,** the Student Government Association urges the University of Houston and President Renu Khator to voice public support for and urge elected officials to call for a ceasefire in Gaza;

**Be it further enacted,** the Student Government Association calls for the University of Houston leadership to seek action for the removal of Starbucks and McDonald's from on-campus operations;

**Be it further enacted,** the structure and individual representatives of this committee will be determined and approved by Students for Justice in Palestine Officer Board and the Student Government Association;

**Be it further enacted,** that this committee will actively assess the ethical standing of consumer products sold on campus through a Socially Responsible Investment and Purchasing Screening;

**Be it further enacted,** this committee will be responsible for conducting research in the university's investment and identifying ethical investments and available products on campus;

**Be it further enacted,** this screening process follows policy development that is dependent on the ethical standards and precedents set by legitimate human rights organizations, including but not limited to the United Nations, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch;

**Be it further enacted,** that the Removal of Starbucks and McDonalds from the University of Houston will be added to the ballot of the Student Government Association election in Spring 2024, in the form of a "yes/no" referendum, in which a "yes" indicates support of the replacement of the Starbucks in Student Center South with an alternative coffee outlet and the

McDonald's in Student Center South with another alternative fast food chain restaurant. All students will be eligible to vote in the referendum.

**Be it further enacted,** the ballot option will be displayed as the following:

“Starbucks Inc. has a history of human rights abuse allegations, including but not limited to the use of slave labor for the harvesting of coffee beans in Mesas Farm in Campos Altos, Brazil, for production of their coffee products and allegedly violating workers’ freedom of speech.

Israeli McDonald's chains donated thousands of free meals to Israeli defense forces while the state of Israel imposed a complete siege on the civilian population of Gaza leading to famine.

With this in mind, do you vote in support of replacing the Starbucks in Student Center South with an alternative coffee outlet, such as Cougar Grounds, and the McDonald's in Student Center South with another alternative fast food chain restaurant?”

**Be it further enacted,** voting for this ballot option will take place from 12 AM February 26th, 2024 to 12 AM March 1st 2024.

**Be it further enacted,** voting will take place from 12AM February 26th, 2024 to 12:00AM March 1st, 2024.

**APPROVED**

Benjamin Rizk

Benjamin Rizk  
Student Government President

Date of President's Approval: 2-18-2024

Sophia Wilson

Speaker Wilson  
Speaker of the Senate

Date of Senate Approval: 02-18-2024

