

## Statement from the LSE Encampment, 22 May 2024

At the time of this statement, students are occupying the ground floor of the London School of Economics' (LSE) Bloom Building\*, in ongoing protest at the university's financial complicity in the genocide of the Palestinian people. Central amongst the students' [demands](#) is the issue of divestment. The encampment is targeting LSE's £89m worth of investments into crimes against the Palestinian people, the arms trade, fossil fuels, and the financing of such egregious activities. The ongoing protest follows the publication of the 116-page [Assets in Apartheid](#) report into these investments, which was compiled by concerned students and staff over a period of more than six months. The report has been endorsed by several LSE student societies, the LSE UCU branch and a coalition of external organisations such as the Campaign Against Arms Trade. The report was launched at a press conference on 14 May, on the eve of the 76<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Nakba, a day that commemorates the violent expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from their homeland in 1948.

This student occupation did not begin in a political vacuum. It takes place with the explicit support of over 400 LSE staff and faculty members in their [petition](#), alongside the unanimous UCU branch motion demanding divestment and support for an immediate ceasefire on 17 May. In addition to this, an alumni campaign has been launched, with an [open letter](#) containing over 700 signatures, in a coordinated effort to show the diffuse level of support and solidarity with student occupiers. A group of Jewish students and staff at the LSE have also written [an open letter](#) in support of the encampment. Occupiers have also been grateful to receive material support from students and staff at LSE, in addition to the wider London and international community. The positive media attention that the encampment has received, and the report upon which it is premised, is a testament to the urgency and widespread support for our demands.

For example, Peter Frankental, Amnesty International UK's Economic Affairs Director, said:

*"This report provides a vital wake-up call to LSE to urgently improve the stewardship of its investments, ensuring it's no longer profiting from corporate activities linked to serious human rights violations and the devastation caused by the climate crisis.*

*With growing calls for universities around the world to clean up their investment portfolios - not least in relation to mounting evidence of war crimes by the Israeli authorities and their racist system of apartheid against the Palestinian people—this report couldn't have come at a more important time."*

On 22 May, the Senior Management Committee (SMC) emailed the LSE community giving the false impression that students' demands had emerged unexpectedly. The SMC argued that these demands were released within the last week, and that they "cannot, responsibly, answer them immediately." The University management's correspondence was entirely misrepresentative; furthermore, it is an unconscionable position to adopt given the ongoing genocide faced by Palestinians. We refuse to accept this position, and instead view the occupation as the culmination of multiple long-term campaigns and struggles.

The preliminary investigation demonstrated clear culpability in the aforementioned egregious activities, and the "plausible" genocide ruled by the International Court of Justice being committed in Gaza by the Israeli war machine. Moreover, the information that LSE's investment portfolio did not align with the University's own Ethical & Sustainable Governance (ESG) policy was also communicated five months ago. Specifically, the ESG policy covers direct investments, but in no way ensures ethical or sustainability standards regarding *indirect* investments, rendering it effectively meaningless and, therefore, a non-policy.

After just one meeting with LSESU Palestine Society representatives on 30 January, with no tangible signs of progress, the SMC refused to meet again with students to discuss the report's findings. Thus, while SMC claimed in their message to the LSE community on 22 May, that "constructive dialogue is always our preferred approach," it is the University who has refused to engage in peaceful dialogue with concerned students and staff for many months, not the other way around. Their email to the LSE community specified that "there are many ways for individuals to express themselves peacefully," however, it was LSE management who shut down these lines of communication. This left students with little choice, other than to make their collective presence known and heard by disrupting the "business as usual" ethic of the LSE and its SMC. We do so in grief and full knowledge that there are no universities left remaining in Gaza.

The purported notion that the SMC are unable to act swiftly in the context of international crises is also completely undermined by the unfaltering speed with which LSE—alongside almost all British and Western institutions, academic and otherwise—responded following the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Within just nine days (4 March 2022) LSE released its "Message regarding the war in Ukraine," in which not only did LSE "deplore the catastrophic impact of the war" but also expanded LSE's Scholars at Risk fund by £250,000 in light of the invasion. No such provisions have been made, or even alluded to, concerning the genocide in Gaza. This demonstrates a clear double-standard.

Similarly, LSE management disavowed itself of the Stonewall inclusivity programme without any prior or proper consultation of the wider University community in 2021. It demonstrates their ability to act swiftly and unilaterally when they deem it politically viable or valuable to do so. This is evidence to the fact that "institutional neutrality" is nothing but an illusion, and that there is a deep-running hypocrisy and Eurocentric double-standard within the official actions and statements of LSE and other such British institutions. It also exposes a corrosive democratic deficit in both LSE's wider management and its specific investment decision-making processes.

Despite meeting with negotiating representatives of the student body and the ongoing occupation, the SMC have refused to engage with students on the basis of good faith. They have not accorded with any procedural norms of meeting arrangements, by declining to have a mutually agreed-upon agenda and hindering negotiations by trying to utilise matters related to the occupiers safety and security as a bargaining chip. It seems clear to us that students' wellbeing is, or at least ought to be, a non-negotiable matter, and that the SMC's approach is to undermine the viability of peaceful protest. They have also twice refused to allow open negotiations with student observers.

The SMC's school-wide email made unfounded accusations concerning a separate protest which occurred in the Bloom Building on 22 May. A few individuals from Santander bank were prevented from entering a room designated for their 'Executive Education' training by LSE. Those students' actions were not undertaken by individuals directly affiliated with the student occupation. The encampment stands in full solidarity with them, recognising Santander's \$9.4bn worth of investments into illegal occupations, apartheid, and the ongoing genocide, not to mention their many billions invested in fossil fuels and climate breakdown. We have since learned that the LSE takes £7,000 per attendee, earning itself an estimated £245,000 for one week of courses—a figure which alone could pay for the Scholars At Risk scheme's expansion for Palestinian academics, in line with that made for Ukrainians.

The financiers of such heinous activities clearly have no place on a university campus which claims, at its core, to seek "to know the causes of things." We know full well—in great detail, thanks to the hard work and perseverance of committed researchers and investigators—the causes of genocide and the causes of climate breakdown. Their causes are invariably those institutions and financial operations which continue to fund and support destruction while pretending to do otherwise, which LSE does best (LSE claimed its title as the first carbon-neutral UK university in 2022, while [reporting](#) around £7m of indirect investments into fossil fuels in 2023). We know too well the causes of such things, and we are acting together in the desperate hope that we will soon see an end to them.

Following the Santander incident, the claim was also made that their bank executives had been filmed, and that this constituted a form of personal harassment. In this claim, we find the LSE's hypocrisy once again laid bare, given that they have repeatedly called for occupying students to remove coverings on CCTV cameras in the occupied areas in which we are currently living and sleeping, which would expose us to constant surveillance and a complete invasion of privacy. There have also been many instances of agitators entering the building and filming student occupiers without any consent, despite assurances that security would not tolerate such antagonistic behaviour. We wish that the gap between their displays of protectiveness for bank executives and those for their students—including a large proportion of Muslim women in particular need of privacy—were not so gapingly wide.

The SMC has also characterised its own students as engaging in bullying and discriminatory behaviour—an accusation which the students deny outright and view as entirely unfair—both in person and in the email. In a similarly troubling vein, the SMC have also attempted to leverage the health and wellbeing of the student occupiers on multiple occasions, and in various different ways. This has included but is not limited to the locking of toilets on multiple nights, the shutting-off of water taps, refusal to open windows, and the general creation of an environment uncondusive to the students' general welfare. Although we have a committed team of internal welfare attendees, the conditions imposed upon students by the University management—which also include the denial of access to showers and a separate sleeping area for our Muslim sisters—limit the capacity of our collective well-being and protest effort.

Beyond the general well-being concerns of students, there have been multiple instances of gendered Islamophobia in the treatment of Muslim women, affecting their right to protest on equal terms with the student occupation community. Within the first week of the occupation, multiple veiled Muslim women were ordered by security to remove their face coverings against their will, clearly infringing on their religious rights and equality. Security staff claim that they were not given instructions to do so, but did also not receive clear instructions to the contrary from the SMC, despite their own assertion that "freedom of expression does not mean the freedom for tolerating bullying, harassment, or discrimination." These incidents alone clearly constitute all three of those utterly intolerable actions. The LSESU Islamic Society has also compiled a detailed year-long report of similar such incidents, which will soon be shared publicly.

One spokesperson from the occupation encampment says: "The divergence between LSE's position on the war in Ukraine, compared to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, reveals the guise of institutional neutrality for what it has been all along: a façade. LSE has revealed that it is only mobilised to act in unconditional support for white Europeans suffering militarised violence and mass trauma, while ignoring the brutalisation of Arab bodies." Another comments that "LSE's correspondence seeks in every instance to de-politicise the facts surrounding the student occupation, demands, and calls for divestment, while simultaneously failing to ensure the general well-being of protesting students."

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\*Renamed in memorium after Marshall Bloom, an American anti-apartheid and anti-war student activist who was suspended from LSE for leading the first student occupation in the UK here in 1967 against LSE's complicity in Rhodesian apartheid. Bloom subsequently committed suicide following his draft call into the Vietnam War. The building is formally (and now formerly) known as the Marshall Building, but the students condemn any official association of LSE with Sir Paul Marshall, the major owner of GB News and [exposed](#) racist, whom it is funded by and named after.