

## SUDAN AND THE YALE COLLEGE COUNCIL

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On Wednesday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, the Yale College Council (YCC), which I led in 1998-99, passed an important resolution. The YCC recommended that the Yale Corporation determine if Yale's endowment has any holdings in companies that are tied to the Sudanese government and, if so, to pressure those companies to use their connections to the government to ameliorate the humanitarian crisis in Sudan or, if they fail to do so, to divest those holdings. In addition, the YCC recommended that the Yale Administration develop a policy on investing in companies operating in other situations in which atrocities are being or have been perpetrated. My experience over the past several years focusing academically and professionally on atrocity issues, including by spending time with perpetrators and victims of, and bystanders to, the 1994 Rwandan genocide, compels me to believe that it is imperative to seize all appropriate opportunities to help prevent or stop heinous crimes, especially genocide. Passage of this resolution also presents an opportunity to reflect on the proper role of the YCC—and perhaps any student government—in such matters.

Whether the Yale Administration invests in corporations that are tied to the Sudanese government is of critical importance. Overwhelming evidence suggests that the Sudanese government either actively supports or is at least complicit in the Darfur atrocities, which the U.S. government has characterized as “genocide.” Investments in companies tied to the Sudanese government may be used in furtherance of these atrocities. Given that companies therefore may have an impact on perpetuating the atrocities, Yale should use its investment clout to urge those companies to play a constructive role. If those companies refuse, then it is imperative that Yale divest from them without delay.

A decision by Yale's Administration to pressure or divest whatever holdings it has in corporations that are tied to the Sudanese government could contribute to a broader campaign to help cripple Khartoum's ability to actively or passively support the Janjaweed, as well as in making an important symbolic statement about its concern for the prevention and cessation of massive human rights violations. Yale is considered—and considers itself—a leader in social justice (for example, in the 1980s it divested its holdings in South Africa to protest against apartheid), and yet its peer institutions, Dartmouth, Harvard, and Stanford have already announced that they will divest from implicated companies in Sudan such as ABB Ltd., Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company, PetroChina, Petronas, Sinopec, Sudanese White Nile Petroleum Company, and Tatneft.

It is appropriate and right that the YCC took a position on this issue. Students contribute to—and benefit from—Yale's endowment. What the Administration chooses to—and *not* to—invest in affects *all* Yale students, from the financial aid students receive to the quality and quantity of student facilities, faculty, and other resources. As such, all Yale students should be concerned about the source of the endowment's profits.

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Some might argue that it is not within the YCC's mandate to consider such matters. However, as the issue of the University's investments affects all Yale students, the YCC, as the only designated representative body of the undergraduate community, properly decided to express its view. While some might also suggest that the YCC should focus on less politically charged issues like organizing Spring Fling, there is no reason, from my perspective of having led the YCC, that it cannot do both effectively. As I have also seen while spending the last three years in England, student governments on other campuses are often far more engaged in political issues that affect their student bodies, all while managing to organize the campus-wide activities that are expected of them.

The YCC's resolution matters. Even if the resolution does not help persuade the Administration to pressure or divest whatever holdings it may have, it would still have been appropriate and right for the YCC to consider and to pass the resolution. It is important, if the YCC feels that it is part of its representative purpose to do so, to record its view, if it has one, on even politically charged issues that impact or at least concern the Yale student body. The issue of the University's investments is one of those cases.

The YCC, like its analogues across the country and around the world, is less of a "student government" and more of a lobbying group in areas beyond the limited funds it directly controls. Sometimes its lobbying efforts on issues ranging from financial aid to dining hall reform are successful; sometimes they are not. In every case, though, given my experience, I believe that the Administration considers the YCC's views.

It is in the Yale undergraduate community's interest to have a strong and effective YCC. As the only designated representative advocate of undergraduate students' concerns, the YCC can be a useful servant of the Yale undergraduate community. As in the case of Yale's possible investments in Sudan, there are issues in which the YCC should become involved. But there should be a continuing campus-wide discussion regarding other issues on which the YCC should state a position. The more students that are involved in this discussion, the more representative and effective the YCC can be.

Since taking my first step onto Old Campus almost a decade ago, I have been proud to be an Eli. I would be prouder still if the Yale Administration pressured or, if that effort fails, divested whatever holdings it has in corporations tied to the Sudanese government and also developed a coherent policy that it abided by when considering whether to invest in or divest from holdings that are tied to other alleged supporters or perpetrators of atrocities, especially genocide. The YCC's recent resolution, however controversial or effective it may be, is a step in the right direction.