



December 3, 2021

Re: President Gertler's Letter on Divestment, Net Zero and a Climate Positive Campus

We, the elected and hired representatives of the Victoria University Students' Administrative Council, call for proactive, good-faith, collaborative, committed, and transparent action on combating climate change, in particular, as well as all community advocacy efforts and decision making. We reiterate our call on Victoria University to divest all funds from the fossil fuel industry and reinvest into a just recovery, working against extraction and exploitation that disproportionately impacts marginalized communities and commit to sustainability and climate justice initiatives as outlined in the [Vic Zero report](#).

The evidence of climate change is not newly incontrovertible. If it takes one extra report alongside decades of research, political calls to action, protests, media coverage, community activism, and a well-established culture of combating climate change, then the University of Toronto is not the leading institution it purports to be. The past decade and beyond has been home to a lively and bustling culture of activism that has been routinely ignored. We would like to thank the countless students, faculty, staff, and community members who have made noise, produced work, contributed labour, and provided support. Universities are pioneers, innovators, and hubs of scientific data and social leadership; this University has not listened to a single iota of what has truly made this institution great.

Instead, the University of Toronto has only acted when it was beneficial for its own reputation and financial status. These two aspects are not selfish motivations on their own, however, an institution that acts solely on these grounds is an institution that prioritizes greed and pride over doing good for its community, staff and faculty, students, and mandate. Similarly, this Council has been and will continue to be supportive of the divestment and climate justice initiatives. However, this Council rejects any idea that a commitment to divestment is proof of this university's genuine commitment to combating climate change. There is no moral high ground; the onus is on the university to prove its intentions with divestment and beyond

As students passionate about promoting urgent, sustainable, and holistic initiatives towards a Climate Positive campus, we would like to remind our administrators that fossil fuel divestment neither begins or ends with our investment managers. In terms of finances, it goes beyond investment funds but also includes pensions, land and property, and various different assets. Student activists have increasingly been educated in these areas, however our general unfamiliarity with these specialized fields should not serve as a barrier to our demands for our money and any for the supposed benefit of students to be used responsibly. We ask for the



acknowledgment of climate justice as an issue much larger than an economic plan. It is an issue that affects the sociopolitical affairs and physical spaces of our community. We believe climate positivity and climate justice also involves solidarity with Indigenous peoples of Canada, deep attention to the land our campus continues to occupy, investment in climate positive infrastructure in our buildings and in their maintenance, and so much more. We urge students to join us in our continued efforts to see climate positivity and climate justice pursued dynamically and intersectionally.

We are thankful for the University's acknowledgement of student climate activists, and the painstaking labour students engaged in environmental advocacy undertaken over the last decade. However, our gratitude is overshadowed by our disappointment in the lack of accountability the University has taken for silencing, and oftentimes belittling the work of climate activists in our community.

In 2015, faculty members, staff, and students first began collectively calling on the University to divest from fossil fuels. An extensive report was released by the President's Advisory Committee on "[Divestment from Fossil Fuels](#)" suggesting a number of initiatives related to sustainability, divestment, and climate positivity on campus. Although President Gertler released a [14-point plan](#) as a result of the Committee's findings, the implementation of these initiatives, updates on the University's detailed plans, and student involvement has stalled.

We ask our University to continue moving forward with urgency, and to continue responding to our demands for change and greater transparency in the realm of climate justice seriously. We recall the unclear and contentious history between student activists and university administrators to honour the frustrating and ongoing work of students in our community who ask for justice, action, and accountability from our University.

Indigenous knowledge systems and land stewardship have made great progress in addressing the climate crisis on their lands, yet they are not included in climate action conversations. Indigenous peoples cannot be made a sacrifice to protect corporate profits and defer impactful climate action. Indigenous voices were missing from the COP26 conference, as world leaders only came to make money from stolen land and resources. In this way, COP26 has simply been a continuation of colonialism. If UofT truly wishes to push the envelope, it must better incorporate the voices of Indigenous peoples in the community and students on campus into their divestment plans. Indigenous peoples bear much of the brunt of the impacts of climate



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change, and are consistently on the frontlines in the fight against further damage, making a successful campaign for climate justice impossible without their inclusion.

Indigenous peoples have an important way of viewing climate action and conservation, as this land and what exists on it are not viewed simply as resources or commodities, as they are in the eyes of many local, provincial, and national leaders. This land is integral to the culture of Indigenous communities, and Indigenous practices on the land demonstrate their respect for the environment and its sustainment. It is no surprise that 80% of the world's biodiversity survives on their territories. Indigenous land defenders have kept up the fight for climate justice despite the fact that they make up a large proportion of land rights activists murdered as well as their continued exclusion from important conversations; they have remained resilient in the face of colonization and betrayal for many years. We thank them for not giving up their fight, even during this last-ditch effort to save the planet.

It is time that Indigenous peoples are taken seriously rather than only being made visible by leaders and decision-making bodies for their tokenization. Indigenous peoples are the true experts when it comes to proper land stewardship, so engaging with Indigenous voices by putting them into positions of power and including them in the decision-making will be crucial to carving out a more sustainable and just future. We recognize their contributions to tackling climate change, and we hope that their vision and solutions will be heard.

As it is mentioned in President Gertler's letter, the UofT is a co-founder of the "Investing to Address Climate Change" charter, whose signatory institutions commit to reducing the carbon footprints of their investment portfolios in "transparent and measurable ways." Our student body's demands for transparency and accountability are not new. We demand tangible evidence of transparency from the University that invites its students into collaboration and dialogue about the strides it is taking towards climate positivity. We call for more elaborate timelines, and we demand invitations to check-ins and campus town halls that allow us to participate in the development of climate justice initiatives. Our campus is full of incredible climate activists who have committed their lives, bodies, and work towards climate justice long before our administrators. We ask to be recognized for our work and involved in the implementation of climate-positive policies that benefit us all.

We also hope to see transparent governance from our University not only in matters of climate change and climate leadership, but in the ways the University addresses issues of sexual violence on campus, anti-Palestinian discrimination, the agency, intelligence, and value of



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students, and all decisions that impact this university's mandate on academic freedom, community leadership, scholastic excellence, and more.

In solidarity and service,

The Victoria University Students' Administrative Council

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