

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
February 11 & 12, 2025
(Virtual)**

**Call for Ethical Action in Sponsorship and Investment
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BACKGROUND

Statement of Facts

In response to the need for direct action and open discussion, a meetup for “Archivists for a Permanent Ceasefire” was organized during the 2024 SAA Annual Meeting. Recent statements and actions of the ICC, namely the May 20, 2024 ICC arrest warrants and the July 19, 2024 Advisory Opinion, and the ongoing threat of climate injustice, inspired the participants to form the collaboration for this divestment petition. We call for an immediate permanent ceasefire, the decolonization of Gaza, and a halt to the annihilation of earth's precious beings and ecosystems carried out through war, and the extraction and exploitation of earth's resources. Writers of this petition are in solidarity with organizations that express similar values, principles, and goals.

As supported by reports published by the Librarians and Archivists with Palestine (LAP), Heritage for Peace, the Palestinian Ministry of Culture, and the Arab Regional Group at the International Council of Monuments and Sites, the indiscriminate destruction of historical sites, communities and cultural institutions has led to the loss of archival artifacts, collective memory, and the destruction of Indigenous culture. Archives, libraries, and museums are important sites of knowledge, and serve as community spaces that support cultural heritage. The destruction of archives and historical sites, such as the Central Archives of Gaza City, the Rafah Museum, the Great Omari Mosque, and the Church of Saint Porphyrius represents an irreplaceable loss to the global community, and hinders our historical understanding, and knowledge of other cultures.

We call upon the SSA Council to uphold the 2023-2025 Strategic Plan goal #4.4 of “ensuring transparency, accountability, integrity, professionalism, and social responsibility in conducting its activities.” As advocates for archives and archivists, the SAA should be moved to boycott and divest from companies that are involved in the systematic destruction of cultural heritage institutions, social infrastructure, and the natural spaces that support our ability to live. Moving forward, the SAA must act as a proponent of ongoing futures and “living archives,” through the support of diversity, community, and the interconnections between humans, creatures, and natural environments. We call on the SAA to uphold its core values and ethics, and “develop and follow professional standards that promote transparency and mitigate harm.”

DISCUSSION

Our demands are motivated by the horrors of the ongoing Israeli assault on Gaza, and the rapid destruction of natural ecosystems and habitats and communities; caused by climate change, colonial farming/mining practices, and regional violence. While we recognize and appreciate the March 2024 Statement on Israel-Hamas War issued by the SAA, given the relentless and cruel continuation of this conflict, we seek further action from SAA leadership, staff, and members.

A call for ethical sponsorship and investment by SAA would continue to fortify our commitments to our members, values, and principles. Over the past decade, archivists, librarians, historians, and other scholars have stood in solidarity with the international boycott, divest, and sanction (BDS) movement. The Association of Asian American Studies, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, and the American Studies Association endorsed BDS in 2013. The Middle East Studies Association passed a BDS referendum in 2022. The American Anthropological Association passed an academic boycott of Israel in 2023. These organizations, many overlapping with SAA's work and goals, exemplify approaches to implementing sentiments and visions expressed in public statements. We call upon the SSA Council to uphold the 2023-2025 Strategic Plan goal #4.4 of "ensuring transparency, accountability, integrity, professionalism, and social responsibility in conducting its activities." As advocates for archives and archivists, the SAA should be moved to boycott and divest from companies that are involved in the systematic destruction of cultural heritage institutions, social infrastructure, and the natural spaces that support our ability to live. Moving forward, the SAA must act as a proponent of ongoing futures and "living archives," through the support of diversity, community, and the interconnections between humans, creatures, and natural environments. We call on the SAA to uphold its core values and ethics, and "develop and follow professional standards that promote transparency and mitigate harm."

RECOMMENDATION(S)

We urge SAA and SAAF to divest and boycott companies and firms associated with, benefiting from, or supporting weapons manufacturing, prisons, and fossil fuel development.

We call on the SAA Council to establish a committee within thirty days that will develop an ethics-review system for SAA and SAAF investments, affiliations and sponsorships in a timely period, not to exceed ninety days.

Using this review system, we task SAA Council to immediately audit existing fiscal relationships with concrete actions to dissolve and divest from companies and firms within SAA next fiscal year. While final review criteria will vary, this petition encourages divestment from industries or institutions associated with, benefiting from, or supporting prisons, weapons manufacturing, fossil fuel development, and climate destruction after committing a thorough review of all investments, affiliations and sponsorships.

We also call on the SAA Council to audit the investment positions of SAA Foundation and publicly identify SAAF holdings in military industry and fossil fuels firms in accordance with the SAA 2023-2025 Strategic Plan goal #4.4. It is imperative to the culture of a democratic organization that there is accountability, transparency, and information accessibility. We recommend to the Council's attention an exemplary list of prohibited firms, with justifications for their prohibition, which has been produced by community members of Rutgers University. Additionally, we recommend that the SAA Council uphold socially responsible investing principles, as pioneered by the Calvert Foundation.

Support Statement:

This action also aligns with other recent statements including the 2019 SAA Action for Archives and Climate Change, and the release of the 2016 SAA Position on Archives and the Environment, and the June 2024 statement issued by the American Libraries Association (ALA) deploring the loss of life and calling on all parties to uphold international human rights law. For the record, we wish to remind readers that the genocide in Gaza has caused the deaths of 186,000+ Palestinians. This Western-funded bombing and demolition campaign has caused vast destruction of places of residence, education, and worship. In violation of international law, Israel continues to occupy Palestine and utilizes famine and disease as weapons of war. Thousands of Palestinians are buried in the rubble or detained in torturous conditions in Israel prisons without legal due process, representation, or oversight.

Secondly, given the numerous ongoing and historic use of biochemical warfare in areas beyond Palestine, Sudan, and Ukraine, this call for SAA action also calls attention to the direct negative impact warfare has on natural and human built environments contributing to a variety of crises including Climate Change. For example, studies show that over 5% global greenhouse gas emissions are produced by military machinery on a yearly basis. Additionally, the destruction of fragile unique ecosystems such as the ecocide occurring in the Gaza strip threatens not only the biological life of all living beings on this planet, but all the cultural life of generations both human and non-human to come. Ongoing bombardment in the Gaza strip has also led to the complete shutdown of wastewater treatment meaning sewage contamination from both human lifeforms and occupation structures has bled into beaches, farm soil, and existing freshwater systems.

Thirdly there is precedent within SAA's history for material political action in line with social-justice values. In the 1980's, SAA's Committee on the Status of Women was instrumental in relocating the annual meeting to states which had passed the Equal Rights Amendment, up through 1986. In 2016, the SAA Council approved the "Position on Archives and the Environment," and pledged to "work to mitigate the effects of major natural or human-made disasters on archival collections and facilities," and "pursue sustainable choices when planning conferences and meetings." The 2024 Statement on the Israel-Hamas War, mourned the loss of life and the destruction of cultural heritage sites, and called for international intervention and a ceasefire. These statements alone are not sufficient in addressing the material consequences of genocide, climate destruction, and social injustice.

Impact on Strategic Priorities :

This will positively impact the SAA strategic priorities as demonstrated above.

Fiscal Impact:

While final review criteria will vary, this petition encourages divestment from industries or institutions associated with, benefiting from, or supporting prisons, weapons manufacturing, fossil fuel development, and climate destruction after committing a thorough review of all investments, affiliations and sponsorships. We also call on the SAA Council to audit the investment positions of SAA Foundation and publicly identify SAAF holdings in military industry and fossil fuels firms. We recommend to the Council's attention an exemplary list of prohibited firms, with justifications for their prohibition, which has been produced by community members of Rutgers University.