

MIT Coalition Against Apartheid
W20-401

29 September 1986

Dr. Paul E. Gray
Office of the President
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear President Gray,

We write to you having just recently been informed that the forum on MIT's South Africa-related investments--which we were told was being planned for this fall--has been canceled. Furthermore, we have learned from UAP Bryan Moser that the cancellation was due to a failure on the part of the MIT administration--especially Vice-President Constantine Simonides and the Corporation Joint Advisory Committee (CJAC)--to follow through with its agreements on time, thereby making it impossible for the MIT Colloquium Committee to organize the event properly.

The Colloquium Committee has asked us whether we would prefer this event to be re-scheduled during IAP or during the spring term. Dr. Gray, does it make a difference? Will it make a difference whether it even happens at all? We ask because we are tired of these endless discussions that go nowhere; next year is too late; \$150 million invested in apartheid is \$150 million too much: divest *now*.

Since our formation a year and a half ago, this demand for immediate and complete divestment has been constant and clear. During this time, that demand has been joined by pro-divestment resolutions passed by the MIT faculty, by the graduate student body, and by the undergraduate student body; over thirty colleges and universities across the country have completely divested; and the black-led frontline states that border South Africa--which stand to suffer severely for their actions--have called for and imposed sanctions against South Africa. Most importantly, the blacks of South Africa themselves, whose demands we should listen to above all others, have--both individually and collectively--continued to call overwhelmingly for the withdrawal of foreign investment from their country.

And yet not only has MIT failed to divest, but its official leaders have responded to entreaties for divestment with a stream of evasions, broken promises, and foot-dragging. A brief chronology of some recent events illustrates why we are tired, and why we are angry.

A year ago, MIT held a colloquium on South Africa. It was a well-attended and very educational event. Unfortunately, it did not directly address the question of MIT's responsibility, a question which was obviously--as members of the Coalition then pointed out--the most relevant one.

We were then told that MIT was in the process of re-evaluating its South Africa investment policy, and that we could participate in this re-evaluation by meeting with the Advisory Committee on Shareholder Responsibility (ACSR). A week before the end of classes we were informed that the ACSR would meet privately with three Coalition members on December 11--the second to last day of classes and arguably the worst day of the term for students. Nonetheless, we attended the meeting.

At that meeting we emphasized the importance of having an *open* meeting so that any interested members of the MIT community could participate in the re-evaluation. The ACSR said that they would call a meeting during the spring term. After several weeks, we were contacted by the ACSR, only to discover that MIT had already completed its re-evaluation without community-wide input, and that this so-called "re-evaluation" resulted in virtually no change at all.

It was at this point that, in frustration, we built a symbolic South African "Township Alexandra" to dramatize the plight of the South Africans, and to show solidarity with them in their struggle. As you recall, we also brought our concerns directly to the MIT Corporation at their March 7th meeting. Although over 100 Coalition members requested that two of their number be allowed into the meeting to present their case directly to those who make MIT's investment decisions, this was not allowed. Instead, a week later, Vice-presidents William Dickson and Constantine Simonides--the same man whose negligence caused the cancellation of this fall's forum--led the Campus Police on a dawn raid which resulted in the destruction of Township Alexandra and the arrest of eight MIT students.

Last June, in private meetings with CJAC and the with the Executive Committee of the Corporation, we again requested to meet directly and *publicly* with MIT's leaders--so that the MIT Community could be involved in a genuine re-evaluation. This request was received extremely reluctantly. CJAC members claimed that such a public involvement would inevitably involve Corporation members in "debate." This they deemed undesirable because it would, they claimed, increase hostility between anti-apartheid activists and Institute officials.

Apparently not recognizing that it was MIT's support of racism in South Africa that was the single major cause of any hostility, CJAC instead proposed a forum to be held this fall intended to resolve the so-called "communication problem" which had allegedly arisen during the events surrounding the arrest and prosecution of students last spring. CJAC hedged on whether Corporation members would be a part of this forum.

It appeared obvious to us then that MIT officials wanted once again to avoid the central problem--MIT's investment policy--by concentrating only on its symptoms. Yet apparently, to judge from the cancellation of this forum, MIT cannot even keep its promises to deal with the symptoms. How then, Dr. Gray, can we expect that you or the Corporation will deal with the problem itself?

It seems clear from the above history that unless we and other concerned members of the MIT community continue to raise the problem vigorously and forcefully, it will not be dealt with. We have desired to be a part of a humane university--one that might be moved by arguments based on principles of reason and dictates of conscience. Sadly, however, it seems that MIT's investment decisionmakers know no principle besides profit, and that unless those of us who desire a more humane investment policy are willing to learn the lessons of Columbia and Berkeley, MIT will not divest.

Accordingly, we wish to inform you that we will continue to be open to any meaningful discussions that would allow the MIT community to participate in a *genuine* re-evaluation of MIT's investment policy. We will not, however, waste our time in polite conversations with meaningless committees or in backroom meetings behind closed doors. Neither will we be parlayed into passivity by endless postponements and empty promises. This issue is too important; the imperative to act is too clear. MIT must divest. To help achieve this end, we will be encouraging the MIT community to join our rally this Friday, October 3rd, where we hope once again to bring this issue to the attention of the MIT Corporation during their Fall meeting.

For the Coalition Against Apartheid,

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Gretchen Ritter G

Larry Kolodney G

Scott Saleska 86

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xc: Emily Wade, Chair, Corporation Joint Advisory Committee;
Bryan Moser, Undergraduate Association President;

The Tech