

A LETTER TO THE HARVARD COMMUNITY

Dear Friend,

In the Yard today you will undoubtedly notice several new and seemingly foreign structures. SASC constructed this Ivory Tower overlooking a shantytown last night. Here will be an area of continual education, presence, and protest about divestiture, South Africa and this university. The following note is an explication.

Shanties and the Ivory Tower: What are they?

There is a place just outside of Capetown, South Africa known as "Crossroads." 14,000 black South Africans live there illegally, in shanties that speak of a misery far greater than we can show here in Harvard Yard. These people have no human services to speak of, little educational opportunity and no political rights. These conditions are typical of the lives of the majority of people in South Africa.

Shanties like these have appeared on college campuses across the country. Though they portray only one of apartheid's many aspects, shanties have come to symbolize it. The Ivory Tower, another familiar symbol, represents the distance, the apartness, and the isolation of universities. Yet, our university cannot be a removed entity. Through Harvard's investment policy as well as through the values, responsibilities and education it imparts to us, our university affects many people and communities around the country and throughout the world.

Why Now?

SASC chose to build this symbol last night because the time was appropriate. Despite the majority sentiment on campus which supports divestiture and which echoes the call of the majority of black South Africans, Harvard has still not divested. Obviously the President and the Harvard Corporation are in a dwindling minority in their opposition to divestiture. What may not be obvious is that they enforce their own isolation. This excludes the majority of the Harvard community from the process by which decisions affecting them are made. As a result, University policy is necessarily insensitive and unaccommodating to the needs and aspirations of all of us.

The Myth of Dialogue

There is no open debate at Harvard University on divestiture and University policy. President Bok has repeatedly refused to address an open, university-wide forum on divestiture; he has stipulated that all meetings with him on divestiture be considered private, and he ignored the 1984 recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Shareholder Responsibility that Harvard divest. This committee was appointed by Bok himself and is made up of students, faculty and alumni. The private and broken dialogues on the university's investment policy and its role in and obligations to society do not add up to debate. Furthermore, such dialogues are conducted between unequals. If ever alive in the past, debate is now dead.

Shanties AND an Ivory Tower

Although the Tower overlooks the shantytown, its perspective is one from which shanties and the people who live in them are invisible. Here stands a Tower without windows. And this is precisely the perspective of those who make and institute the policies that secure the continued existence of shantytowns.

Today in South Africa, people are protesting for their most basic political rights. Students may boycott the schools which instruct them with an inferior curriculum; parents may boycott businesses; workers may strike. There is no doubt, however, that more people will die as the suffering caused by apartheid continues.

Today the old and familiar symbols of the shanty and the Ivory Tower represent a relationship between the university and the society which supports it, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, in this country as well as in South Africa.

Towards an Open University: Join Us

For all of us, the gains we make here, both towards divestiture and towards a more open university at Harvard, will make Harvard a better place to be. Stop in, drop by. We want to talk with you, to know what you think. Let us all be together and in the middle of Harvard Yard create an open university, based on democratic participation and on community.