

Canada's elite McGill University threatens to 'cut student society funding' over pro-Palestine BDS vote

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McGill University is threatening to cut funding to its student society after a policy supporting the non-violent BDS movement was voted in.

Students are saying the move is an 'attack on democracy' [Getty]

The Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) in Canada is at risk of having its funding withheld after it voted in favour of a Palestine Solidarity Policy that brands Israel as a "settler-colonial apartheid" state.

Students at the Montreal-based university endorsed a policy last week in a referendum calling for a boycott of "all corporations and institutions complicit in an entrenched system of settler-colonial apartheid against Palestinians".

The referendum - which also called for a boycott of Israel - took place on 21 March with more than 71 percent voting in favour of adopting the Palestine Solidarity Policy.

Middle East Studies Association backs BDS in key vote

The following day, the university's deputy provost sent Darshan Daryanani, the President of the SSMU, a Notice of Default which claimed that the policy was unconstitutional and discriminatory without providing clear justifications for the claim.

On 24 March, McGill University's Media Relations Office (MRO) sent an email on behalf of the deputy provost to all McGill students and staff publicly declaring its intent to terminate a Memorandum of Agreement with the SSMU. Terminating the MoA would mean that the student society would be cut from university funding.

Here's our response to @mcgill's attacks on Palestine solidarity and student democracy 👉 <https://t.co/glipcpb6EW>

— Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (@CJPME) March 25, 2022

"As a student union, we are entitled to our democratic autonomy to effectively carry out our role, and we fear that the statement made by McGill University severely encroaches on this ability," Daryanani urged in a statement.

Hundreds of students also signed a petition urging the institution to divest from all Israeli products and update its discrimination and racism policy regarding Israel.

Divesting is one of the methods called for by the nonviolent Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement in support of Palestinians.

McGill University responded by saying the petition is "wholly antithetical to our commitment to equity and inclusion".

"They purport to draw on our commitment to equity and inclusion to call for measures that would divide our community, notably by demanding that we exclude some worldviews and ways of self-identifying from our campus," the statement added.

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The non-violent BDS movement says it is inspired by the campaign that targeted South Africa's apartheid regime and is seeking to put an end to Israel's brutal occupation of the West Bank.

Israel claims the movement is a strategic threat and accuses it of antisemitism – a claim activists firmly deny, calling it an attempt to discredit them.

BDS, which advocates peaceful resistance, aims to pressure Israel to adhere to international law and human rights via lobbying and campaigning.

The group urged corporations, artists, and academic institutions to sever ties with Israel until a Palestinian state is created.