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To the members of the MIT community:

In January, I asked Professor Hal Abelson to conduct a thorough analysis of MIT's involvement in the Aaron Swartz matter. On July 26, he submitted his report. I write today to share the report and offer my initial reactions. I am also releasing a number of related documents.

I thank Professor Abelson and his review panel for taking on this important assignment. Professor Abelson brought to the work his unique perspective as a longtime champion of the open source movement. He and his panel, which included Institute Professor Emeritus Peter Diamond, took the time they needed to complete the review to their high standards, and the report reflects their dedication to the task.

The review panel's careful account provides something we have not had until now: an independent description of the actual events at MIT and of MIT's decisions in the context of what MIT knew as the events unfolded. The report also sets the record straight by dispelling widely circulated myths. For example, it makes clear that MIT did not "target" Aaron Swartz, we did not seek federal prosecution, punishment or jail time, and we did not oppose a plea bargain.

The report's introduction summarizes some of its most significant findings, but I urge everyone in the MIT community to read the report in its entirety. From studying this review of MIT's role, I am confident that MIT's decisions were reasonable, appropriate and made in good faith. The report confirms my trust in the members of the MIT community involved in the Swartz events. Throughout, they have acted with integrity and heart, and served MIT with outstanding professionalism. I know the last seven months have been hard on them and their families, and they have my deepest respect and gratitude.

I have heard from many in our community who believe our actions were proper and justified. Others feel differently, and the review panel identifies alternate paths we could have followed, including becoming more actively involved in the case as it evolved. I am sure there will be further discussion and reflection now that we have the report in hand.

But I propose that we use the fall semester to focus our energies on the set of questions the report raises in Part V. I am grateful to the review panel for framing these important questions – some specific to MIT, others focused on topics of national and global significance that mattered very much to Aaron Swartz himself.

In response to one of the MIT-specific questions, I have asked Executive Vice President and Treasurer Israel Ruiz to organize a review of MIT policies on the collection, provision and retention of electronic records, so that Academic Council – MIT's senior academic and administrative leaders – have the background they need to improve them. For the remaining questions that relate to MIT policies and resources, I will ask Academic Council to propose to me by the end of this coming semester any changes they deem appropriate.

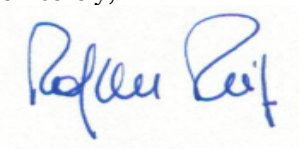
I believe the report's larger questions deserve the collective wisdom of the MIT community. I have therefore asked Provost Chris Kaiser to work with Faculty Chair Steven Hall to design a process of community engagement that will allow students, alumni, faculty, staff and MIT Corporation members to explore these subjects together this fall and shape the best course for MIT.

Through the largest questions it poses around open access, intellectual property, responsibility and ethics in the digital domain, the report presents the MIT community with a significant opportunity to learn and lead, on matters of immediate and lasting importance. Because these questions bear so directly on the expertise, interests and values of the people of MIT, I believe we should explore them, respectfully debate our differences and translate our learning into constructive action.

Knowing the tragedy of Aaron Swartz's death, I read the report with a tremendous sense of sorrow. His family and friends suffered a terrible personal loss, and the Internet community lost an exceptional leader. Even those of us who never knew him mourn the loss of someone so young and so brilliant.

I ask us to remember him and to come together as a community to discuss, deliberate, learn and act.

Sincerely,



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