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Subject: Last night's vigil
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L. Rafael Reif, President

To the members of the MIT community,

Our community held [a vigil last night](#) that felt historic.

The voices of the 15 community members who spoke were so intensely moving that I write now to encourage any of you who did not have the opportunity to watch the live vigil to take the time to [watch the recorded webcast](#).

I am deeply grateful to all the students, staff and faculty who spoke with such power, and especially to our Institute Community and Equity Officer, John Dozier, for leading the team that brought us the gift of this gathering.

On the subject of institutional racism and systemic injustice, this is a moment of reckoning for our nation, and [we continue to have serious work to do at MIT](#).

Below my signature and [here, you will find my remarks from the vigil](#). They begin to frame the challenges before us.

Now, I expect us to intensify our ongoing work – drawing on findings, advice and recommendations contributed by members of our community over many years, and most recently by a group of student leaders – to develop a strategic plan on diversity, equity and inclusion and put it into practice.

Living up to our ideals as a community is work we can only do together – and I believe we must.

Sincerely,

L. Rafael Reif

Remarks at the MIT Community Vigil

June 2, 2020

I am deeply honored and humbled to be asked to speak today. In the face of tragedy, it is always important to come together. And coming together has never felt more important than now, when we must be so far apart.

I wish more than anything that I could be in person with all of you. And I wish especially that you could be in person with each other, because it may be the deepest human comfort, in a time of suffering, to know that we are not alone.

We come together now because we know, and we insist, that black lives matter. That black lives are worthy and complex and inspiring. That every black person is unique and beautifully human, and that every black person of every age, everywhere, deserves dignity and decency and respect.

And of course, we come together because we know that these truths, and the basic humanity of people of color, are violated in our nation every day. Last week, the example that shocked the nation was the brutal killing of George Floyd. But so many have suffered before him over weeks and decades and centuries.

Our nation is in terrible trouble. And part of that trouble is the systemic racism that is destroying us from the inside. A society that tolerates official brutality thereby, of course, encourages it.

If we hope to live in a society that is better than its worst impulses, we must use this awful moment to drive and accelerate positive change.

- We must begin by insisting on full accountability for the officers involved in killing Mr. Floyd.
- We need to make clear to anyone who doubts it that the rage and anguish unleashed by his murder are deeply justified.
- We need to support the current protests, which are, overwhelmingly filled with peaceful people begging for justice and peace.
- And, to address systemic racism in policing and criminal justice, we must press for systemic reform.

I hope we can join together in doing those outward things. But we also have work to do closer to home.

All of us who can count on the advantages of education, money, power and even safety in our homes and neighborhoods – all of us with those advantages benefit, every day, from a society with a racist history and a racist present. And MIT is part of that society.

This is our community. I believe it is a wonderful community. But it is our responsibility to make it better. So it is more important than ever that we continue and accelerate the efforts that are already underway with the leadership of our ICEO, John Dozier, to develop a strategic plan for diversity, equity and inclusion, so that as a community we can live up to our highest ideals.

I have enormous faith in and love for the MIT community. In our online graduation celebration last week, I was overwhelmed by the images of our old familiar life together and of the incredible beauty of all those faces. Faces of every complexion. Your faces. On campus. Working and playing and thinking and making together.

It is difficult to face this moment in our forced separation without even the consolation of being able to embrace or to wipe each other's tears.

To those of you who are African American or of African descent: I know that I cannot know what you are feeling. But I can stand with you. I do stand with you. And I am certain all the people of MIT do too.

Mine is not the voice that most needs to be heard today. So we will turn now to our elected student leaders.

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