Statement by the Chancellor’s Committee on Protocol for Demonstrations at Commencement and other Academic Exercises

June 1, 2018

The aim of this statement is to outline principles related to demonstrations and leafleting at Commencement and other academic exercises. This statement is prompted both by our desire to ensure that academic exercises go well and honor important celebrations, and also to support and accommodate the exercise of freedom of expression.

As a general principle, it is the intent of the Institute to provide an opportunity for the expression of viewpoints at events, programs, activities, and exercises, consistent with our shared values of civil and respectful discourse, safety, and freedom of expression. In general terms, reasonable accommodations will be made for such expression taking into account appropriate proximity and visibility to the event or activity in question, the maintenance of required access and egress, and the absolute necessity to maintain a safe environment. From time to time, MIT’s ability to act on these general principles may be influenced or superseded by Federal and/or State authorities whose jurisdiction may apply.

We affirm the following principles:

1. Commencement Exercises require complex and precise planning. The Commencement Committee has the responsibility to manage the proceedings so that the Exercises are safe, go smoothly, and appropriately honor the graduates, their families, guests, and the Institute. This means, among other things, that the line of procession, the atmosphere in Killian Court, and the comings and goings of guests, must be free of obstruction or interference.

2. MIT is committed to providing venues for demonstrations and leafleting at various locations on campus where members of the community will be able to express their views on issues that may or may not be related to the event at hand. Consistent with #1 above, there are restrictions on such activities. For example, Killian Court will be accessible only by members of the graduating class, faculty, stage assembly, and persons holding tickets. Access to Johnson Athletics Center is limited to members of the graduating class, as well as designated faculty and staff participating in the Exercises. For security purposes, in both Killian Court and Johnson Athletics Center, all persons will be electronically scanned as they enter. As a result, the line of march between Johnson Center and Killian Court will be restricted so that the integrity and safety of the procession can be maintained at all times.

3. For Commencement, the general locations available for demonstrations and leafleting have been established by this Committee. Questions regarding these locations may be directed to Gayle Gallagher, Executive Officer for Commencement, at gayle@mit.edu.

4. MIT relies on a tradition of collaboration in addressing sensitive community issues. If problems emerge in managing Commencement and in accommodating demonstrations, our intention is that colleagues will treat this as a community matter and not, in the first instance, as a law enforcement matter. While Campus Police are responsible for crowd control and public safety, our intention is that the Commencement Committee and designated colleagues will have primary responsibility for coordinating communication and resolving conflicts as they arise.

While this statement applies to Commencement, the general principles also apply to all academic exercises (e.g. convocations, lectures, etc.) and other large events, including demonstrations. This spirit of our community is to protect the integrity of the exercises and to provide opportunities for those who wish to use the occasion to express their views on social, political, or other issues.

Questions regarding this statement should be directed to Chancellor Eric Grimson, Chair of the Commencement Committee. Those planning demonstrations should contact Gayle Gallagher, Executive Officer for Commencement, at gayle@mit.edu.