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## Letter from Israel Ruiz, MIT Executive VP and Treasurer, about Saturday's hoax incident

Posted on February 27, 2013 by Joanna Kao

To the members of the MIT community:

This past weekend, a distressing event disrupted the life of our campus community. I am writing now to share details about the incident and important information that affects us all.

### The incident itself

On Saturday, February 23 at 7:28 AM, the dispatch center at the Cambridge Police Department (CPD) received an electronic communication reporting an emergency at 77 Massachusetts Avenue. The communication came through a Sprint relay message service designed for people with hearing or speech impediments. The communication went on for more than 18 minutes, with a Sprint relay operator interacting with the caller and in turn communicating with a CPD dispatcher.

One minute into the communication, the caller reported someone with a "really big gun," and "armor" who was "getting out of control." The CPD dispatcher immediately sent CPD units and State Police to the site, and notified MIT Police.

Within two minutes of being notified, the first MIT Police units entered Building 7. A team of six MIT Police officers coordinated with upwards of 25 CPD and State Police to immediately secure the area to keep the community safe and to search the Main Group. This tight teamwork was possible because all MIT Police officers train with CPD for emergency scenarios.

At 7:32 AM, the caller identified the alleged gunman by name. The person named was confirmed to be a member of MIT's staff. This person was later questioned and found not to be connected to the incident in any way.

At 7:35 AM, the caller identified MIT President Rafael Reif as the target and said that the alleged gunman was heading towards the administration offices. At 7:37 AM, the caller indicated that the alleged gunman was retaliating against people involved in the suicide of Aaron Swartz. The officers continued their search of the Main Group and proceeded to a second location to ensure the safety of MIT's President. At 8:52 AM, a campus-wide alert was sent.

### Assessing MIT's response

The tactical police response was outstanding, with an incredibly fast response time. Our officers worked actively to search and secure the buildings until they could confidently issue an "all-clear" a few hours later. We are deeply grateful to these officers for their courage and professionalism.

It is clear, however, that while the officers focused on securing the area and ensuring the safety of the targeted individuals, we should have alerted the community about the threat much more quickly and that the communication protocols we had in place did not meet the community's reasonable expectations. We have already

revised our procedures to make sure that we are now in a position to alert the community within minutes of such an incident.

### **The incident was a hoax – but this is not a game**

As we all know by now, there was never a gunman on campus. The reported sighting was a hoax. But that does not mean that it was minor or to be taken lightly. For a time on Saturday morning, upwards of 30 armed police officers were searching a building for a person they believed was also armed; it is not hard to see how someone could have been seriously injured by mistake. This hoax also involved a malicious allegation against a member of our community and direct threats of physical harm to MIT staff. We should all understand that this is not a game.

### **Next steps**

This incident has created the opportunity to refresh the community's understanding of MIT's safety protocols and procedures. In the near future, we will incorporate such training into MIT's many orientation programs. I have also asked MIT's Security and Emergency Management Office (SEMO) staff to reach out and share this information with all facets of our community, including those living in our residence halls and FSILGs. These briefings will start next week.

In the meantime, rest assured that we have redoubled our efforts to ensure the safety of the MIT community, to protect the security and integrity of our campus, and to preserve our shared ability to advance the work of MIT.

Sincerely,

Israel Ruiz

*(Sent at 3:48 p.m., Feb. 27, 2013)*

*The Tech's article on Saturday's hoax: <http://tech.mit.edu/V133/N7/hoax.html>*

*Timeline of events, from report to all-clear: <http://tech.mit.edu/V133/N7/hoax/timeline.html>*

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