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HUFF POST TECH

MIT Officials Subject To 'Pattern of Harassment And Personal Threats' Since Aaron Swartz's Death

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Officials at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have faced harassment and personal threats since the death of well-known Internet activist Aaron Swartz, the university's president said Tuesday.

In a letter to the MIT community, President Rafael Reif said he would publicly release documents about MIT's role in the case after the university completes its own investigation into the matter.

Swartz's attorneys requested documents from MIT last week and argued the names of university officials should be included. But Reif said he would redact employees' names and identifying information to protect their privacy because university officials had "seen a pattern of harassment and personal threats" since Swartz's death.

"In this volatile atmosphere, I have the responsibility to protect the privacy and safety of those members of our community who have become involved in this matter in the course of doing their jobs for MIT, and to ensure a safe environment for all of us who call MIT home," Reif wrote.

On Feb. 23, for example, the university was the target of a hoax in which an unidentified caller claimed that a gunman on campus was targeting Reif and "retaliating against people involved in the suicide of Aaron Swartz," according to MIT Executive Vice President Israel Ruiz.

Swartz, 26, who committed suicide in January in his Brooklyn home, was to be tried in April for allegedly stealing millions of scholarly journal articles from the digital archive JSTOR using MIT's computer network. He faced an array of charges that carried a potential sentence of over 30 years in prison.

Unlike JSTOR, which publicly distanced itself from the charges against Swartz, MIT remained silent during the federal investigation. His supporters have said that his looming federal trial was a contributing factor in his death, and have blamed both prosecutors and MIT for pursuing the case.

MIT officials declined to support a petition last fall that could have helped Swartz avoid prison. The school also provided details of Swartz's computer activity to law enforcement without a court order, helping prosecutors build their case against him, his attorneys have said in interviews and court filings.

Reif has acknowledged that MIT "played a role" in Swartz's legal struggles. MIT professor Hal Abelson is investigating the university's involvement in the case against Swartz "through a careful process that includes a review of this written material as well as extensive in-person interviews," Reif said.

Reif did not say when the university's report on the Swartz case would be released.

By Taboola