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Address: P.O. Box 2692
Germantown, MD 20875-2692
USA

June 16, 2006

Honourable President of India Dr APJ Abdul Kalam
Honourable Prime Minister of India Dr Manmohan Singh

Ref: Reservation Quota for OBCs at the Indian Institutes of Technology

Your Excellencies,

We are writing to you collectively on behalf of the PanIIT Alumni organizations, representing approximately 150,000 alumni of the seven IITs worldwide. Overall we are supportive of affirmative action and creating equal opportunity for all. **However, we do not believe a system of reservations is the correct approach and we oppose the creation of reservation quotas for OBCs.** We admire the Government's allocation of resources and appointment of an advisory panel for examining these issues. We urge the government to include members of the PanIIT Alumni Association as representatives on this panel and to help implement affirmative action.

IIT alumni have held considerable deliberations on the subject of reservations and deeply support affirmative action and the creation of equal opportunities to all segments of society. However we do not believe reservations and quotas are viable alternatives for the following reasons:

1) We believe that meritocracy and excellence should be the guiding principles in implementing reforms. Reservations and quotas along the lines of caste, creed, ethnicity, etc. have only served to divide people and are regressive and counter-productive to the fundamental goals of social change. The consensus amongst us is that we can bring about reforms through fundamental changes in the methods in which opportunities are created for all people – regardless of caste, creed, religion, sex or social orientation.

2) Current system of Quotas is ineffective and facilities for education are inadequate in IITs: There is evidence that the IITs are currently unable to fulfill even the previously set aside quota for candidates from SC/ST. Also, there is a significant drop-out rate among students who are admitted to the IITs through this system. It should be evident that merely increasing the quota does not achieve the intended goals. *Also, increasing the student intake at the IITs without addressing the acute shortage of faculty and inadequate infrastructure – hostel rooms, student facilities, research labs etc. – would only serve to diminish the world-class standards achieved to date.*

3) IITs are Institutes of National Importance: THE INSTITUTES OF TECHNOLOGY ACT, 1961 declared the IITs to be institutions of national importance and provided the legal framework for their administration and functioning. From the beginning, the vision that guided the IITs was that these should be institutions of excellence in technology education and research. The IITs were set up for creating a group of Indians to be globally competitive. They were never created for mass education. Affirmative action should be applied for mass education at primary level

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and not for Institutions of Excellence. The Parliament of India has, in its wisdom, declared the IITs to be “Institutes of National Importance” and they deserve to be treated accordingly.

4) Reservations would compromise the National Interest: Because of the great vision with which the IITs were created under the leadership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and nurtured under subsequent administrations, these institutions have gained worldwide recognition. This brand recognition has been hard won, and has played a very important role in the rising international esteem for India and Indians in recent years. We urge the current and future leaders of India to preserve and enhance this great brand by continuing to be uncompromising in the highest standards of education and maintaining this system of meritocracy. Anything else would be against national interest.

5) IITs need to enhance their standards: The Review Committee, appointed by the Government of India, under the chairmanship of Prof Rama Rao in 2003-04 assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the IITs and proposed a new vision to guide the IITs in the coming decades. It pointed out that the present reputation of the IITs is based, among other things, on the achievements of its alumni. But, for the future, this would not be sufficient. To be an important part of the emerging knowledge economy, India needs the IITs to become institutions of knowledge creation and cutting-edge research. Therefore, it is essential that the IITs be uncompromising in the selection process through the JEE exam. PanIIT has created an Academic and Research Council of distinguished alumni including two US Presidential Medal of Technology honoree and faculties of institutions like MIT, Stanford, Carnegie-Mellon, UCLA, etc. This council will be working with the National Knowledge Commission to improve the research excellence in IITs to World Class Standards.

The PanIIT Alumni association is united in the need to work with the underprivileged groups. The following ideas are not necessarily comprehensive but we believe they will be helpful in creating the opportunities for affirmative action and access to higher education. We will bring the resources of our association to work with the government to help implement programs that achieve the goals for social reforms. Our recommendations include:

- a. **All course work from the IITs should be made available for free on the Internet:** Such a program would give unrestricted access to all individuals who might be interested to follow the daily classroom lectures at the IITs – thus, greatly expanding the capacity of the existing facilities. Students who follow this program may be able to supplement their Internet-based education through private or public institutions leading to an Associates Degree, recognized by the IITs.
- b. **Increased access to primary and secondary education in backward areas:** This will create opportunities for people from all classes from backward areas to be better prepared for the Joint Entrance Examination to the IITs. Such focused schools may adopt a process of separating “gifted and talented” students for special education and perhaps have them participate in summer programs at the IITs.

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Singapore

c. Implementing programs at IITs for regular and after-hours classes: Post-graduate students should be encouraged to teach tutorial classes and after-hours programs that are designed for SC/ST/OBC students who are competent but are unable to compete effectively in the JEE. Distance learning classes using Edusat and the internet should be adopted for offering preparatory tutorials to enable such students become fully capable to compete in JEE.

d. Creation of institutions similar to the IITs but focused on vocational education, and highly skilled workers: We see a big gap between the IITs and India's ability to produce good technicians. We recommend the creation of institutions similar to the IITs but focused on vocational education, and highly skilled workers. As India encourages the growth of the manufacturing sector, we believe the demand for such services will greatly increase and, thus, offer new economic opportunities.

We strongly believe that meaningful social reforms can be achieved through constructive implementation of specific initiatives such as the ones mentioned above. We are of the opinion that quotas and reservations are counter-productive and compromise the system of meritocracy and excellence with which the IITs were founded. PanIIT Alumni organizations will continue to work with the government and the industry to achieve the noble objectives of social reform, through initiatives such as those listed above and programs such as the PanIIT Foundation for Rural Transformation (PiFort).

Sincerely,

PanIIT Organization – USA
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