To,
Shri. Sanjay Kumar,
School Education and Sports Department Secretary,
Government of Maharashtra,
Mantralaya, Mumbai.

August 24th 2009

Sub - MOU between Government of Maharashtra and Microsoft Corporation

Shri Sanjay Kumar,

We have read in the newspapers that the School Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, has entered into a MOU with Microsoft Corporation India Private Limited, wherein Microsoft will setup three IT academies and train government school teachers on ICTs.

Teacher training, of which computer related skills is a part, is a complex process, as highlighted for example, in our National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education. The public education system has teacher training structures and resources which engage with this pedagogically demanding task. Secondly, it is important to recognize that ICT in education is a curricular issue and not a mere technology issue. The design of curriculum of ICTs in education needs to be determined by those working in the education field who have experience and understanding of curricular processes, and not by technology companies**. It is against basic pedagogical principles to hand over these basic educational processes of teacher professional development and curriculum design, to a private technology vendor** whose core competency is in writing software products and whose main interest is in creating mass markets for its software products**.**

Under similar MOUs that Microsoft has entered into few other state Governments, the Government has no role in curriculum design or in the teacher capacity building processes. The result is that only Microsoft applications will be 'taught' in these academies and this 'teaching' is done by the companies staff. The MOU typically does not allow the teaching of alternatives that exist, such as GNU Linux operating system or the Open Office application. This restriction contravenes the ostensible 'philanthropic' nature of the support extended by Microsoft and there are **critical pedagogical and economic issues** with such a restriction:

1. As mentioned Curriculum design and development and teacher professional development are complex issues, requiring efforts amongst curriculum designers and teacher educators. Considering the pedagogical principle of diversity of learning, at the very minimum, forcing a single vendor's ICT applications on teachers in Government schools is not desirable. Also the process of learning should focus on concepts and principles and not on specific products. In the case of proprietary software, it is not possible to learn the underlying principles of the application since the source code is hidden by the vendor, unlike the case of FOSS.

Under this program thus government funds are being used (teachers TA, DA etc is paid by the Government), to promote proprietary products of one technology vendor.

2. Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) such as GNU/Linux, Open Office, Firefox have equivalent features as the Microsoft Windows, Microsoft Office and Internet Explorer applications being taught in these academies. Millions of people are using these FOSS applications all over the world and in India as well. The advantage of Free and Open Source software (FOSS) is that the user has the freedom to make copies and distribute the same, which is an important freedom for the teachers who undergo the training under this MOU, **to prevent their (and their students) being compelled to spend considerable amounts of money procuring proprietary software for their home computers.**

3. FOSS applications can also be modified - both maintained and extended by anybody, instead of being forced to be dependent on only one vendor. In addition, learning ICTs acquires a new powerful dimension - of the learners being co-constructors using software as tools, instead of being 'passive consumers' of proprietary technologies. The 'National Curriculum Framework 2005, which is an important part of Government Education policy has stress this principle of 'constructivism' as being critical to learning. CDAC has taken advantage of this feature of FOSS, to release local language extensions of Open Office in major Indian Languages.

4. Most importantly Governments by their very reach and mandate, have a key role in setting public standards. By the very act of adopting free and open technologies, the Government supports setting up of open standards, which supports the public good. By this, governments will be encouraging the use of FOSS. Use of FOSS at such a huge scale will help create a FOSS eco-system, which has enormous benefits to society at large, apart from all its direct benefits for the adopting government agencies. This is the reason why the MCIT has released draft document mandating adoption of Open Standards in government. Keeping the above advantages in mind, the National Knowledge Commission and the Planning Commission have also recommended that governments should encourage and adopt FOSS widely. The draft **National Policy on ICTs in school education from MHRD** also specifically declares that "**Free and Open Source Software should be preferred."**

5. The Education department of Kerala has successfully used FOSS in their IT@Schools program which has saved the state over fifty crores over the past few years and has enabled all its teachers in high schools to become ICT literate and also train their students on FOSS platforms. The Kerala program is also based on a customised educational software FOSS distribution and includes several educational software tools, this customisation by the institutions in Kerala is possible only due to selection of FOSS platform. The Kerala program also consciously integrates the teacher training into its regular/mainstream teacher professional development processes and avoids outsourcing it to staff of technology companies**. The experience of Kerala needs to be considered since it is vastly superior program to those which are based on proprietary technologies and the outsourcing of teacher training**. A paper on the IT@Schools program is enclosed with this letter (also available on http://www.itforchange.net/media/clps.pdf). Many other states, including Gujarat, Orissa, Assam have realized the advantages of adopting FOSS in their schools.

Thus we feel that it is problematic for the government to enter into a MOU where the curriculum only covers proprietary technologies of one technology vendor. We hope our submission will be considered by the Government to cancel the MOU with Microsoft and **immediately set up a task force that will formulate an overall regulatory framework that will guide PPPs in education**. **In addition, a framework for developing a coherent policy and framework of action on teacher professional development, within which the norms and scope of participation of private profit making multinational agencies such as Microsoft can be defined and regulated, is essential.**

We look forward to your response and an appointment to discuss the matter as soon as possible.

Yours truly,
Signatories

1. Alex M George, Education Researcher, Bangalore
2. Amman Madan, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur
3. Amit Sen Gupta, All India Peoples Science Network, Delhi
4. Anand Patwardhan, Documentary Film-maker, Mumbai
5. Anil K Gupta, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and Co-ordinator, SRISTI and Honey Bee Network
6. Anjali Noronha, Ekalavya, Hoshangabad and member of National Curriculum Framework for school

education (NCF) 2005 National Focus Group on Systemic Reforms for Curriculum Change

7. Anita Rampal, Central Institute of Education, Delhi University, Delhi and member of NCF 2005 National Focus Group on Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbooks
8. Anusha Ramanathan, University of Mumbai
9. Archana Mehandale, Independent Researcher - Education
10. Chandita Mukherjee, Comet Media Foundation, Mumbai and Member of the NCF 2005, National Focus Group on Educational Technology of NCF 2005
11. Chandran Gopalakrishnan, Comet Media Foundation
12. D. Raghunandan, Delhi Science Forum, Delhi
13. Feroze Chandra, Prathishabd, Mumbai
14. Geeta Nambissan, Zakir Hussain Centre for Educational Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University and member of NCF 2005 National Focus Group on Problems of Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Children
15. Gurumurthy Kasinathan, IT for Change, Bangalore
16. Gurveen Kaur, Centre for Learning, Hyderabad and member of NCF 2005 National Focus Group on Aims of Education
17. Hriday Kant Dewan, Vidya Bhavan Society, Udaipur
18. Indira Jayaram , National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore
19. Jane Sahi, Society for Educational Exploration, Bangalore
20. Jacob Tharu,formerly at Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages , Hyderabad
21. Jaijit Bhattacharya, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi
22. Jayati Ghosh, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and Member, National Knowledge Commission
23. Krishnakant Mane, Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, Mumbai
24. Nagarjuna.G.N, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai
25. Nayana Tara, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore
26. Nandini Manjrekar, Tata Institute of Social Sciences and member of NCF 2005 National Focus Group on Gender Issues in Education
27. Narendra Sisodiya, Bangalore
28. Niranjan Aradhya, Centre for Child and the Law, National Law School of India University, Bangalore
29. Padma Sarangapani, TISS, Mumbai and and member of the National Steering Committee, National Curriculum Framework Review 2005
30. Pooja Das Sarkar, TISS, Mumbai
31. Poonam Batra, Maulana Azad Centre for Elementary, and Social Education, Central Institute of Education, Delhi University and member National Focus Group on Teacher Education
32. Prabir Purkayastha, Knowledge Commons, Delhi
33. R Ramanjunam, Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai and member of the National Steering Committee, National Curriculum Framework Review 2005 and Chairperson, National Focus Group on Teaching of Mathematics
34. Ramagopal K, Centre for Learning, Hyderabad
35. Ramakant Agnihotri, Delhi University, Delhi and Chairperson, National Focus Group on Teaching of Indian Languages
36. Ravi Subramaniam, Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, Mumbai and member of NCF 2005 National Focus Group on Teaching of Mathematics
37. Rekha Pappu, Independent Researcher, Hyderabad
38. Rohit Dhankar, Digantar and Chairperson, National Focus Group on Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbooks
39. Sadhna Saxena, Delhi University, Delhi and member of NCF 2005 National Focus Group on Problems of Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Children
40. Sheshagiri K.M, Education Researcher, Bangalore
41. Shiv Kumar, Swasti, Bangalore
42. Simantini Dhuru, Abacus, Mumbai
43. Sridhar Rajagopalan, Educational Initiatives, Ahmedabad
44. Sunil Batra, Centre for Education, Action and Research, New Delhi
45. Suparna Diwakar, Centre for Leadership and Management in Public Services, Bangalore
46. Upendranadh, Institute for Human Development, New Delhi
47. Vijaya Mulay, member of the National Steering Committee, National Curriculum Framework Review 2005 and Chairperson, National Focus Group on Educational Technology, and Founder Principal, CET Center for Educational Technology, NCERT

48. Vinod Raina, Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti, Delhi
49. Vivek Monteiro , Maths Educator and Physicist,Mumbai
50. Yemuna Sunny, Ekalavya, Hoshangabad and member of NCF 2005 National Focus Group on Teaching of Social Sciences
51. Zakiya Kurrien, Centre For Learning Resources (CLR), Pune

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2. Chief Secretary, Shri. Johny Joseph
3. Hon'ble Chief Minister, Shri Ashok Chavan