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Richard Stallman Inaugurates Free Software Foundation-India

Trivandrum, Kerala, India — **July 20, 2001** — Richard M. Stallman today officially launched the Free Software Foundation of India (FSF-India), the first affiliate in Asia of the Free Software Foundation with a speech at the Freedom First! Conference on Free Software in Trivandrum, Kerala, India. Yesterday, he was received as an honored state guest by government officials to discuss the philosophy behind the movement and the use of free software as a viable, cost-effective alternative for government, educational institutions, and businesses, as well as for all the people of India.

"You are entitled to the freedom that free software gives you", Stallman said. It isn't just in India that people are entitled to an alternative to proprietary software. The inauguration of FSF-India is a step forward in the expansion of the Free Software Foundation. Free software communities around the world are formally organizing, as FSF-India has now done, with a goal of better assisting businesses, governments, and educators everywhere to understand the philosophical ideals behind free software and how these ideals directly create practical advantages to those who use and create it. Stallman continued "Computer users in India, as elsewhere, deserve the freedom to share and change software, the way cooks share and change recipes. So I am pleased to inaugurate the Free Software Foundation of India, which will promote the use and the development of free software in this country. At first, FSF-India will help individuals, communities, schools, governments and enterprises in India make use of the free software that the rest of the world has already developed. Over time, FSF-India will lead Indian programmers to contribute to the human knowledge that free software represents".

"We feel a developing country like India has a special stake in promoting and encouraging the use of free software", said Satish Babu, of FSF-India. "It also is a plus, of course, that there are no software license fees to pay. This is of great importance now that proprietary software companies are switching to a licensing business model for software, meaning you must in effect rent the software and continue to pay for it forever. With free software, if you wish, you can download the software for free, or if a business or school wishes to buy one CD, it can legally install the same CD in every computer on site, without having to pay one penny to anyone, ever again. But there are deeper, more significant benefits. Here in India, we do need to constantly strive for cost-effective solutions. The digital divide is of concern everywhere but especially is it so here in India. Unless we act, the digital divide in India is likely to widen, particularly so because of the country's many languages and its uneven literacy levels. Free software can help level the playing field for emerging nations like India and bridge this divide by encouraging solidarity, collaboration and voluntary community work amongst programmers and computer users and invigorate an indigenous software industry".

"Schools in India can benefit by redistributing free software to save on license fees", Stallman said. "But free software offers a deeper benefit for education: the knowledge in free software is public knowledge, not secret. The sealed black box of a proprietary software system is designed to keep people in the dark. With free software, students can study the software they use, to learn how it works. They can write improvements to the software, and thus learn the craft of software development–which usually consists of improving existing programs".

Dr. Stallman is President and founder of the Free Software Foundation, head quartered in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. In 1984 Stallman began the development of the GNU operating system, which today in its GNU/Linux variants is used by an estimated 20 million people worldwide.

About GNU:

GNU is a Free Software Unix-like operating system. Development of GNU began in 1984. The URL, `http://www.gnu.org/gnu/the-gnu-project.html`, gives more information about GNU and its history.

GNU/Linux is the integrated combination of the GNU operating system with the kernel, Linux, written by Linus Torvalds in 1991. The various versions of GNU/Linux have an estimated 20 million users.

Some people call the GNU/Linux system "Linux", but this misnomer leads to confusion (people cannot tell whether you mean the whole system or the kernel, one part), and spreads an inaccurate picture of how, when and where the system was developed. Making a consistent distinction between GNU/Linux, the whole operating system, and Linux, the kernel, is the best way to clear up the confusion. See the URL, `http://www.gnu.org/gnu/linux-and-gnu.html`, for more explanation.

About the Free Software Foundation:

The Free Software Foundation, founded in 1985, is dedicated to promoting computer users' right to use, study, copy, modify, and redistribute computer programs. The FSF promotes the development and use of free (as in freedom) software—particularly the GNU operating system and its GNU/Linux variants—and free documentation for free software. Their web site, located at http://www.gnu.org, is an important source of information about GNU/Linux. They are head quartered in Boston, MA, USA

About the Free Software Foundation India:

FSF-India is head quartered in Trivandrum, Kerala, India, and is dedicated to eliminating restrictions on copying, redistribution, understanding, and modification of computer programs by promoting the development and use of free software in all areas of computing—but most particularly, by helping to develop the GNU operating system.