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The GNU General Public License Protects Software Freedoms

Boston, Massachusetts, USA — **May 4, 2001** — Richard M. Stallman, president of the Free Software Foundation, and Professor Eben Moglen, general counsel for the Free Software Foundation, today issued statements addressing points raised in yesterday's remarks by Craig Mundie of Microsoft. Stallman and Moglen focused on the importance of freedom for software users and programmers, how the GPL protects those freedoms, and Microsoft's attempt to cast such freedoms in an unfavorable light.

Stallman, author of the GNU General Public License (GNU GPL), stated: "Microsoft describes the GNU GPL as an 'open source' license. To understand the GNU GPL, you must first be aware that the GPL was not designed for open source. The ideas and logic of the GPL stem from the deeper goals and values of the Free Software Movement".

Stallman explained further: "The Free Software Movement was founded in 1984, but its inspiration comes from the ideals of 1776: freedom, community, and voluntary cooperation. This is what leads to free enterprise, to free speech, and to free software". Stallman started GNU, a project to create a free software operating system, along with the Free Software Movement. He wrote the first GPL-style licenses for the GNU project, and released the first version of the GPL itself in 1989. The current version of the GPL was released in 1991, and today is used by thousands of software projects.

Moglen noted that Microsoft's confusion about the GPL's origins is not surprising. He said that "taking advice on what the GPL means from Microsoft is like taking Stalin's word on the meaning of the US Constitution. They don't understand and they're not trying to understand: they're simply trying to scare people out of dealing with a competitor they can't buy, can't intimidate, and can't stop."

Stallman also addressed the propagating nature of the GPL, saying: "Whoever wishes to copy parts of our software into his program must let us use parts of that program in our programs. Nobody is forced to join our club, but those who wish to participate must offer us the same cooperation they receive from us. That makes the system fair."

"Microsoft surely would like to have the benefit of our code without the responsibilities. But it has another, more specific purpose in attacking the GNU GPL. Microsoft is known generally for imitation rather than innovation. Its purpose is strategic–not to improve computing for its users, but to close off alternatives for them."

"Hence their campaign to persuade us to abandon the license that protects our community, the license that won't let them say, 'What's yours is mine, and what's mine is mine'. They want us to let them take whatever they want, without ever giving anything back. They want us to abandon our defenses," concluded Stallman.

Finally, Moglen added that Microsoft is threatened by the power of free software: "Microsoft, which used to say all the time that the software business was ruthlessly competitive, is now matched against a competitor whose model of production and distribution is so much better that Microsoft stands no chance of prevailing in the long run."

Stallman's essay about Microsoft's attacks on the GPL is available online at:

`http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/gpl-american-way.html`

Other comments by Stallman on Microsoft are available online at:

`http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/microsoft.html`

One of Moglen's essays on the Free Software Movement is available online at:

`http://moglen.law.columbia.edu/publications/anarchism.html`

About Richard M. Stallman:

Richard Stallman is the founder of the GNU project, launched in 1984 to develop the free operating system GNU (an acronym for "GNU's Not Unix"), and thereby give computer users the freedom that most of them have lost. GNU is free software: everyone is free to copy it and redistribute it, as well as to make changes either large or small.

Today, Linux-based variants of the GNU system, based on the kernel Linux developed by Linus Torvalds, are in widespread use. There are estimated to be over 17 million users of GNU/Linux systems today. These systems are often mistakenly called just "Linux"; calling them "GNU/Linux" corrects this confusion.

Stallman received the Grace Hopper Award from the Association for Computing Machinery for 1991 for his development of the first Emacs editor in the 1970s. In 1990 he was awarded a MacArthur Foundation fellowship, and in 1996 an honorary doctorate from the Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden. In 1998 he received the Electronic Frontier Foundation's Pioneer award along with Linus Torvalds; in 1999 he received the Yuri Rubinski memorial award.

About Eben Moglen:

Eben Moglen holds a PhD. in history and a J.D. from Yale University. Moglen is currently a professor of law and legal history at Columbia University Law School, and serves as general counsel for the Free Software Foundation.

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 (used widely today in its GNU/Linux variant)— and free documentation. The FSF also helps to spread awareness of the ethical and political issues of freedom in the use of software. Their web site, located at http://www.gnu.org, is an important source of information about GNU/Linux. They are headquartered in Boston, MA, USA.

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