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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**MIT International Development Initiative Launches the
Muhammad Yunus Innovation Challenge to Alleviate Poverty**

November 27 2006, Cambridge, Massachusetts – The MIT International Development Initiative is excited to announce the launch of the inaugural *Muhammad Yunus Innovation Challenge to Alleviate Poverty*. The Challenge, named in honor of 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Muhammad Yunus, was initiated and also supported by MIT alumnus Mr. Mohammed Abdul Latif Jameel, benefactor of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab at MIT (J-PAL). Every year the Yunus Challenge will focus on a different problem faced by some of the poorest communities in the world in an effort to bring these problems to the forefront of the academic community. For the first year, the challenge is to “increase adherence to tuberculosis drugs in rural developing country contexts.” MIT students will be encouraged to develop individual approaches and multi-disciplinary teams to tackle this challenge with support through Public Service Fellowships, the MIT IDEAS Competition, and the innovative D-Lab service learning course. The IDEAS Competition team with the best solution will win the Muhammad Yunus Innovation Challenge award at the Competition awards ceremony on May 2, 2007.

Although effective tuberculosis drugs exist and are widely available, the disease kills 1.7 million people a year, 98% of these deaths are in the developing world. This is largely because the required drug regime is extremely complicated, requiring people to take up to 1,500 pills over a 6-8 month period. Less than half

the TB patients are able to successfully complete this regime, jeopardizing the patient's health and also leading to drug-resistant strains of the disease. The Yunus Challenge intends to harness the energy and inventiveness of MIT students to develop a low-cost scheme for increasing TB drug adherence in rural areas.

This year's challenge was motivated in part by the work of J-PAL researchers and their collaboration with Seva Mandir, an Indian NGO, who together have been designing strategies to improve health delivery in rural Rajasthan. Students will be linked with Seva Mandir and some will have the opportunity to stay in communities where Seva Mandir and J-PAL are working to help them better understand the challenges and constraints these communities face.

In a letter to Dr. Yunus, the challenge funder Mr. Jameel commented that, "Learning about issues facing poor communities is not only critical for ensuring that the innovation work they undertake at MIT is useful and appropriate – it is also a longer term investment in changing the perspective of MIT students throughout their, often highly influential, careers."

As with the design of this year's challenge, future challenges will be informed by and build on the growing partnerships between developing country organizations and parts of the MIT community, including J-PAL and the International Development Initiative.

The [International Development Initiative](#) is a joint program of the Public Service Center and the Edgerton Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The [Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab](#) was founded by professors in the Department of Economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Information and resources regarding the Yunus Challenge are available online at <http://web.mit.edu/ideas>. For further information, contact Alison Hynd at the MIT Public Service Center: 617 258 0691, or <hynd@mit.edu>.

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