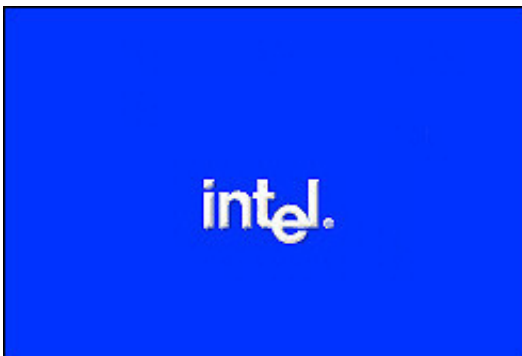


Intel announces technology center in Gaza

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Intel, in a partnership with American Near East Refugee Aid, will build a technology center at the Islamic University of Gaza, the firm announced.

"The Intel IT Center of Excellence, the first of its kind in Gaza, will expand educational and employment opportunities, provide critical IT support for local businesses and organizations, and help stimulate the IT market in Gaza," the ANERA group said in a statement.

Plans for the tech center have been on the drawing board for several months and construction was slated to begin in mid-February, the aid group's country representative, Tom Neu, told United Press International in a telephone interview.

However, due to "land issues," Neu said, the groundbreaking has been delayed. ANERA has already built three such centers in the West Bank.

He stressed that the plans for the center were in place long before the January 25 Palestinian parliamentary elections in which the militant group Hamas won a majority. Neu made it clear that the planned center would position itself above the politics of the Strip.

"We are observing U.S. regulations and not meeting with Hamas leaders," Neu said. But he said that despite the political concerns, his group was "confident the project can proceed and will help the people of the Gaza Strip."

Intel's involvement in the project is part of a larger initiative for the "Digital Transformation Initiative" in the Middle East, company spokesman Chuck Mulloy said in a telephone interview.

The company has had a presence in Israel for more than 30 years, but is only now starting to branch out to the rest of the region with local entrepreneurship, digital accessibility, education and scholarship programs, Mulloy said.

Intel is also in talks with several universities in the region to establish research and development centers, although Mulloy said he couldn't provide any more details than that.

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