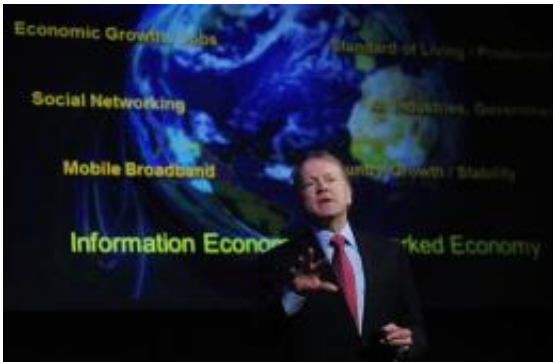# Cisco CEO hopes to create jobs for Israeli Arabs

June 20 2012, by BLAKE SOBCZAK

In this Feb. 16, 2011 file photo, Cisco Chairman & CEO John Chambers speaks during a conference at the Mobile World congress in Barcelona, Spain. Chambers on Wednesday, June 20, 2012 announced an ambitious effort to help create 12,000 high-tech jobs in Israel's distressed Arab sector over the next four years. Chambers said the initiative represents a significant expansion of ?Maantech,? a year-old project launched by major high-tech companies and backed by the Israeli president that aims to reduce gaps between Israeli Arabs and Jews. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez, File)

(AP) — Cisco Systems Inc. CEO and Chairman John Chambers on Wednesday introduced a campaign to help create 12,000 high-tech jobs in Israel's distressed Arab sector over the next four years.

Chambers said the initiative represents an expansion of "Maantech," a year-old project launched by high-tech companies that aims to reduce economic gaps between Israel's Arabs and Jews.

Arabs make up roughly one-fifth of Israel's 8 million citizens. While they enjoy full citizenship rights, they are generally poorer, less educated and frequently suffer discrimination in the housing and job markets.

Israel is a global technology powerhouse, and the high-tech sector is a major growth engine for the local economy. High-tech firms are among the highest paying and most respected places to work.

"We have an opportunity to show the rest of the world what we can do together with a government that really gets it and with citizens who really get it," Chambers said. "If we can move to 12,000 (new employees) within four years, it would be an indication of what's possible."

When Maantech was launched in February 2011, less than a half a percent of employees in Israeli technology companies were Arabs, the company said. Since then, more than 22 companies have joined the project, bringing 324 qualified Israeli Arabs into their ranks, still a small percentage.

Cisco is the program's main source of funds. Other participants include Google Inc., Intel Corp., IBM Corp. and Check Point Software Technologies Ltd., the company said in a statement.

Chambers made his announcement at a conference sponsored by Israel's president, Shimon Peres.

Appearing with the Cisco CEO, Peres said the corporate world is key to promoting coexistence and fighting racism.

"No government or policy could do it. You need the companies," Peres said, adding that "this is the way to pave to peace." Peres won the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize with Israeli and Palestinian leaders for peace efforts.

Several new companies joined Maantech Wednesday, including Israeli telecommunications giant Bezeq, Cadence Design Systems Inc. and OnTarget Communications, according to a statement from the Israeli president's office.