

Haiti's prime minister tours Silicon Valley

November 20 2013, by Martha Mendoza



Laurent Lamothe, Haitian Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, arrives at Buckingham Palace in London in this July 27, 2012 file photo. Lamothe plans to spend Wednesday Nov. 20, 2013 on a whirlwind tour through Silicon Valley's most elite tech campuses, hoping to convince some of the world's wealthiest and most successful corporate executives to share support and innovation with the poorest country in the Americas. (AP Photo/CARL COURT, File)

From Google to Facebook to Apple, Haiti's Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe plans to spend Wednesday on a whirlwind tour through Silicon Valley's most elite tech campuses, hoping to convince some of the world's wealthiest and most successful corporate executives to share support and innovation with the poorest country in the Americas.

Lamothe joins a growing stream of politicians, celebrities and CEOs taking these popular roadshows where they do a little business, a little schmoozing and quite a bit of questioning about how innovation happens in this booming tech region.

If there were an opposite of the affluent Silicon Valley, where entire municipalities have free Wi-Fi, it could be impoverished Haiti, where fewer than 1 percent of Haitians are regularly online.

But there are Internet cafes throughout the capital Port au Prince, and cellphone use is leapfrogging landlines. Some of the millions of dollars of earthquake relief and recovery aid has been spent on trying to get the long impoverished country wired, including a \$3.9 million program launched this fall to deploy 65 miles (105 kilometers) of optical fiber in the country's southern region.

Before heading out to the tech titans, Lamothe spoke to engineers, developers and marketing experts at a tech conference Tuesday in San Francisco.

During the meeting, Salesforce.com CEO Marc Benioff asked Lamothe, who was joined by actor Sean Penn who is active in Haiti's recovery, how the thousands of companies represented there could help.

"All of them want to support you and help in your leadership and the redevelopment of Haiti," Benioff said.

"The Haitian government, we're trying our best to fight against extreme poverty, lift people out of poverty," Lamothe said. "The best way to do it is through technology."

For example, Lamothe said, storing government data in digital clouds would prevent it from being lost in natural disasters. He said the country is trying to build an information and communication system, an online architecture that could involve business and government.

Lamothe was slated Wednesday to meet with tech executives, Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's [chief operating officer](#). A spokesman said Lamothe also hoped to speak with Apple officials about new, educational initiatives.

While this is Lamothe's first visit to the tech titans, the Prince of Asturias made the rounds just last week and South Korea's ambassador to the United States, Ahn Ho-young, swung through in August. The campuses are varied and impressive, with unusual features from Google's bowling alley to a small Wizard of Oz mock-up of Dorothy's house at Facebook, complete with smashed witch legs.

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Citation: Haiti's prime minister tours Silicon Valley (2013, November 20) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-11-haiti-prime-minister-silicon-valley.html>

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