

Google executives visit Cuba to promote free Internet

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Executive Chairman of Google Eric Schmidt speaks at the Chinese University in Hong Kong on November 4, 2013

Google executive chairman Eric Schmidt visited Cuba this week along with three other top executives to promote "a free Internet," Cuban independent online newspaper "14yMedio" reported Sunday.

The four executives "met with officials," spoke "with youth at

polytechnical schools" and, on Saturday, visited the University of Computer Sciences in western Havana, wrote the newspaper, run by dissident blogger Yoani Sanchez.

The two-day visit to the Americas' only communist-run country also included Jared Cohen, Brett Perlmutter and Dan Keyserling.

It was the first such visit by Google executives to "promote the virtues of a free and open Internet," said the new site, which was also contacted by the visiting team.

The visit by Google, which has been accused by Cuba of "scandalously" blocking some of its services on the island, was not reported in any official media.

The Internet giant has justified the services blocked under the full US economic embargo that has been in place since 1962.

In her blog GeneracionY, Sanchez described her meeting Friday with the Google team as "an online workshop."

"We didn't ask him any questions and we didn't want any answers, we just told him who we are and what we are trying to do."

US-based Schmidt confirmed the trip on a Google+ posting Sunday, saying US sanctions on Cuba defied reason.

"Walking around (Havana), it's possible to imagine a new Cuba, perhaps a leader of Latin America education, culture, and business," he wrote.

"Cuba will have to open its political and business economy, and the US will have to overcome our history and open the embargo. Both countries have to do something that is hard to do politically, but it will be worth

it," Schmidt argued.

An underwater cable connecting Cuba to Venezuela opened possibilities to upgrade Internet service starting in 2013.

However, Cuban authorities said financial limitations stopped them from increasing access, and continued with their policy of prioritizing use for universities, research institutes and state entities.

The only Cuban residents who can connect to the Internet from their homes are doctors, journalists and other professionals authorized by the government.

Havana accuses Sanchez, along with other Cuban dissidents, of being a US-paid "mercenary."

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