Facebook founder in Colombia to promote affordable Internet

January 14 2015

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg attends a meeting with Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos (out of frame) at Narino Presidential Palace in Bogota, Colombia, on January 14, 2015

Improved Internet access can be a force for peace, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg said Wednesday during a trip to Colombia to promote his project to boost web availability for two-thirds of the world not yet connected.

The project "Internet.org" launched with other big tech companies including Samsung and Nokia. It aims to improve web access and reduce mobile phone costs in developing countries.

"Giving the people the tools of connectivity is important in itself to create communication," Zuckerberg said at a press conference in Bogota.

"I think a lot of conflicts are caused by misunderstandings."

"The Internet as a whole and social media will bring reconciliation and peace," he added, alluding to the more than 50-year-old armed conflict with the leftist FARC rebels in Colombia, where peace talks are currently under way.

After meeting with Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, Zuckerberg signed an agreement with the government to offer the Internet.org app for free to subscribers of the Tigo mobile phone service.

The app gives users free access to basic online services including weather, Wikipedia, and Facebook, as well as, in Colombia, to government services, according to statements from communications minister Diego Molano and Internet.org.

"This alliance with Facebook represents a big help for our challenge as a country in devising programs to impact lower income communities," Molano said.

He predicted some eight million Colombians could benefit from the Internet.org program.

Zuckerberg's visit in Colombia also included a town hall-style question-and-answer session at a university in the capital with students and

business owners.

The main costs for Internet use are the data plan and the phone or computer purchase.

Zuckerberg said after delivering basic services to more developing nations, the project would look to drive phone costs down to allow more people to afford mobile devices.

Colombia is the first country in Latin America to make the Internet.org app available, following its introduction in Zambia, Kenya and Tanzania.

Of 48 million Colombians, more than nine million subscribe to Internet services, according to an official report in 2013.

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