

Larry Garber, USAID-West Bank/Gaza Mission Director
Remarks at the Inauguration Ceremony of the
Palestinian Information and
Communications Technology Incubator (PICTI)
Al Sheikh Commercial Towers, Ramallah
May 27, 2004

Minister Azzam Al-Ahmad, Minister Maher Masri, Mr. Tareq Maayah, Mr. Tony Barclay, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I am very pleased to join you today to launch the first Palestinian Information and Communications Technology Incubator – PICTI – in the West Bank and Gaza. PICTI represents a successful collaboration between public organizations and private enterprises, and a model that USAID is now promoting worldwide. Under this new model, we join our investments with those of business and community leaders, local governments, universities and others to achieve greater impact and sustainability.

USAID recognizes the skills, resources and assets in the Palestinian community. We are facilitating the pooling of these talents in strategic partnerships to address developmental challenges facing Palestinians today. For example, the combination of the Palestinian Information and Communications Technology Association, PITA; the Palestine Trade Center, PalTrade; and the Palestinian Banking Corporation, PBC, illustrates a unique value chain between the IT industry and key business sectors. Small and medium enterprises understand, add value, and help create the Information and Communications Technology Cluster. The cluster includes exporting firms, suppliers, and trained workers in finance, technology, and infrastructure, and these firms and individuals share markets, entrepreneurship, and export activities.

PICTI builds on the high-quality human resources base of the West Bank and Gaza, the strong entrepreneurial tradition, and an excellent location as an East-West trade link. During the past few years, the Palestinian ICT industry has demonstrated astounding resilience in an economy under adversity. The industry, represented by the Palestinian Information Technology Association, PITA – the championing partner for this initiative – understands the challenges facing them. The industry also recognizes the value of this market opportunity.

In supporting this initiative, USAID recognizes that, to stimulate the desired growth, several parallel efforts are also required. In the next few weeks, the Palestinian National Internet Naming Authority, PNINA, will be inaugurated, representing another independent, public-private entity that USAID is supporting to promote access to the Internet by greater share of the Palestinian people. Given the dynamics of the ICT sector, we also must rapidly enhance the capacity of the Palestinian human resource base to provide the foot soldiers with the necessary skills. In this regard, let me acknowledge the contribution of the U.S. nongovernmental organization ANERA, which recently established a Center of Excellence at Al Quds University, and plans several more, and the

International Youth Foundation, which is introducing IT skills at the secondary school level. I am also happy to see present today the Ministers of Telecommunications and National Economy, who both have a critical role in formulating appropriate policies and ensuring effective regulations.

In addition to the aforementioned partners and others who have made this incubator possible, let me also acknowledge the contribution of USAID's Sherene Abdul-Hadi. She has been with the project from the outset, preparing the proposal for a special USAID incentive fund, working within the USAID bureaucracy and collaborating with all those involved.

Let me close on a personal note. As many of you know, I will leave my position as USAID Mission Director in less than two months' time. The past five years have provided moments of extreme satisfaction and depressing frustration, but our Mission, which is currently celebrating its 10th-year anniversary, has always tried to look toward a better future, and will continue to do so. Given the current difficult circumstances, this project, this building, this collaboration may seem quite peculiar to some. However, in my view, this effort represents the precise response required to create a more hopeful reality. In true Don Quixote fashion, we must continue to tilt at windmills in order to accomplish what may seem like an impossible dream.

Mabruk and Salamo alay-kum [congratulations and peace be with you].