BIRZEIT NEWS

LAUNCH OF ACROSS BORDERS PROJECT - FIRST INTERNET CENTRE OPENED IN DEHEISHE CAMP
Website online at http://www.acrossborders.org
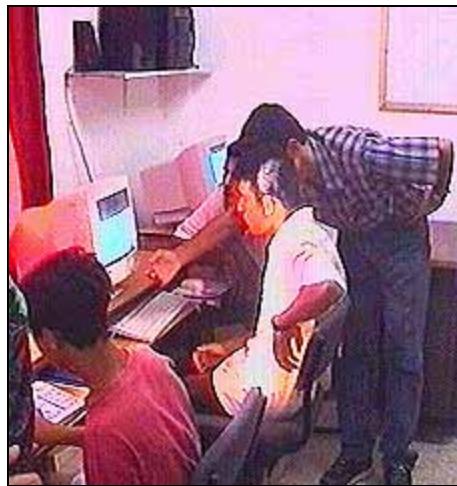
Deheishe, July 24 1999 *Over 150 people attended the launch of The Across Borders Project today in Deheishe refugee camp at the Ibdaa Centre. The Project was initiated in January 1999 by the Birzeit University Information Technology Unit and aims to bring Internet technology into Palestinian refugee camps across the Middle East. It will see the creation of bilingual (English/Arabic) camp websites, including on-line news, oral history and stories from Palestinians refugees. The Across Borders Project also aims to facilitate the connection of refugees with each other.*

The pilot phase of the project was launched in Deheishe Camp, near Bethlehem at the Ibdaa Centre. A fully-equipped computer lab was opened in Deheishe today, and 10 camp residents have recently completed a 36-hour training course at Birzeit University. Courses in basic computer use and internet training will begin within one week at Ibdaa.

Inside the Across Borders Computer Lab, Deheishe

Director of the Birzeit University Information Technology Unit, Marwan Tarazi

Marwan Tarazi began by reciting a poem by Kamal Nasir, which discussed the idea of right of return and the importance of keeping the memory of Palestinian history alive particularly for the younger generation. Tarazi stressed the importance of this project in this respect - as a way of recording and telling the history of Palestinian disposession since 1948 through the eyes of Palestinian refugees.

Muna Muhaisen, one of the co-ordinators of the project, said "We aim to create an information bank on refugee issues on the WWW. Deheishe is the first step, and the project will now extend to Gaza and other camps in the West Bank. The camp websites will offer more than just text, utilizing video and audio technology while online photo-galleries will enable a visual sight of relatives separated by distance and time but connected by technology."

Also launched on Saturday was the project website at http://www.acrossborders.org. The website provides information about the project and about refugees in general. As camps come online they will be added to this website to form a "refugee ring".

Many messages of support have been received for the project from all around the world. Muna Muhaisen and Adam Hanieh concluded the opening ceremony by readng some of these messages from countries such as Lebanon, Kuwait, USA and France.