Dear Class,

The Internet is globalizing, and the culture of the Internet--entrepreneurial, forward-thinking, open--is traveling with it. In a sense, the web brings "water" and other nutrients to creative, energized people living in far flung places around the world--and connects them together into a loose, pan-global society of cultural activists.

As the web globalizes, social, political and legal issues abound. Local Autocrats don't appreciate the enhanced freedom of information and assembly that emerges in web-based networks of activists. Local Monopolists don't appreciate disruptive technologies and business models. For example, voice-over-Internet undercuts the whole complex of international telephone settlements that flow to developing world telcos.

As the Autocrats and Monopolists fight to retain control, the law is used to restrict the freedoms enabled by the Internet. Often this happens at the most basic level. For example, private satellite terminals are illegal in many parts of the world, in order to force international communications to flow through the monopoly, usually-state-controlled telcos. As the Internet flows through state-controlled computers, access to sites deemed subversive is blocked.

The good news is that the law can also be used to promote the freedoms enabled by the Internet. Anti-trust and competition laws can be used to challenge monopoly control of infrastructure. Freedom of speech and assembly on the web can be fought for and won. One's allies in this work form a strange mix: in addition to local entrepreneurs and attorneys, one works with NGOs and international aid organizations--such as the United Nations Development Program, with bilateral aid organizations such as USAID, as well as with the World Bank and other international financial institutions. In addition, certain multinational companies are very supportive. Technology companies such as HP, Intel, Cisco, Sun and Microsoft have proven quite helpful.

To get a feel for what is going on, consider the following: In early October I traveled to Jordan for a technology conference, and was mightily impressed with the open, pluralistic, competent community of people thriving there. Jordan can be an important source of BOTH technology people and open, innovative thinking for the entire Middle East. This is why Jordan matters.

I wrote up a brief trip report. Before I could send it out, a top USAID official was assassinated, non-essential US staff of projects began to be
pulled out, and uncertainty about war in Iraq deepened. So I kept holding back sending out my little story, hoping for a bit more stability and information...

Then a few days before New Year, Robin Miller's more recent trip report on Jordan was referenced on Slashdot (Slashdot December 26, 2002). His story, which I commend to you, inspired me to go ahead and send mine out, as well. Both are similar in spirit and conclusion: Life goes on in the Jordanian tech community so far, despite the challenges. And life there is quite interesting!

So attached to this email is my trip report--complete with pictures! Please enjoy!

Warm regards, and see you on the 17th!

Jim Moore