

tireless efforts of Mr. Abdul Majid Haddad and the Association of Canadian University Graduates in Lebanon.

The ties between our two countries go far beyond personal relationships - Canada and Lebanon share even more. Both of our countries are members of la Francophonie. We know that a common language and cultural heritage favour mutual understanding. We share the same values of freedom of expression and the exchange of ideas. Both of our countries are market economies, and thus we fully understand the importance of international trade.

I am thus joined today by a large delegation of business people, led by my colleague, Mac Harb. Among them, I would like to draw your attention to Mr. Georges Menassas, former Trade Commissioner at the Canadian embassy in Beirut. This is Canada's sixth trade delegation to Lebanon since the election of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's government in 1993.

The presence of this delegation shows how deeply Canadian businesses are committed to the Lebanese market. Indeed, one of the key objectives of my visit is to promote trade relations between our two countries.

Canada's trade with Lebanon has grown by leaps and bounds since the end of the war, largely thanks to the enthusiasm of Lebanese-Canadian entrepreneurs and the pioneering efforts of the Canada-Lebanon Chamber of Commerce.

The reconstruction effort, which we cannot help seeing around us, offers Canadian companies unique opportunities to make use of their skills and international experience in the form of joint ventures and other types of partnership with Lebanon's private sector.

Once peace is restored in the Middle East, Lebanon will offer investors from Canada and other Western countries a unique gateway to the region. I think that Lebanon has an excellent chance of resuming its role as one of the region's major financial centres.

What does reopening our embassy mean? First of all, the embassy will provide immediate assistance and first-hand information to Canadian companies seeking to do business here. The embassy will also enable Canada to strengthen its dialogue with Lebanon on a number of political issues, notably our common quest for peace in the Middle East. As well, it goes without saying that consular and immigration services will be greatly improved. Reopening this embassy is an illustration of the importance that Canada attaches to its privileged relationship with Lebanon, and of the confidence we have toward this country and its future.