

CANADIAN REFLECTIONS ON THE LEGACY OF

# King Hussein

The death of King Hussein in February raises many questions about the future of peace in the Middle East. Andrew N. Robinson is Special Co-ordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. For three years, he was Canada's Ambassador to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Since 1995, Mr. Robinson has chaired, on behalf of Canada, the 45-country Refugee Working Group in the multilateral track of the Middle East peace process. **Canada World View** interviewed Mr. Robinson shortly after the death of King Hussein.

## Canada World View

What are the implications for Canada and for Middle East peace of the death of King Hussein?

## Andrew Robinson

King Hussein himself is irreplaceable. But the work that he has done has left a very solid basis for the development of his country, for the growth of the peace process and also for the continuation of Canada's friendly relationship with Jordan.

During King Hussein's reign, Jordan evolved from a fragile kingdom with few institutions to a state with all the appurtenances of statehood, including a parliament and a functioning civil service. Regionally, the King was a force for Middle East stability. In 1994, he signed a peace treaty with Israel, making Jordan only the second Arab country to do so. That treaty was very much his inspiration. It was negotiated because the King had become convinced that peace with Israel was in Jordan's strategic interest.

## Canada World View

How were Canada's relations with Jordan during Hussein's reign?

photo: courtesy Andrew Robinson

## Andrew Robinson

Consistently strong — even during the Gulf War, which placed Jordan in a particularly dangerous and difficult situation. Canada showed in very concrete ways that we recognized Jordan's predicament, at a time when other friends were less understanding. Essentially, we showed that we supported a Middle Eastern leader who took chances for peace. Jordanians noticed this and remembered.

## Canada World View

What about Canada's leading role in the Refugee Working Group?

## Andrew Robinson

That is another link. There are 3.6 million Palestinian refugees in the Middle East; at least 1.2 million are in Jordan. Jordan has given them citizenship. But they are still refugees by the UN definition. Their situation awaits resolution within the Middle East peace process, and Jordan very much appreciates the leadership Canada is showing in the Refugee Working Group.

## Canada World View

Any personal recollections of King Hussein?

## Andrew Robinson

I was Ambassador to Jordan from 1992 to 1995 and I met him as required during that period. King Hussein had an especially warm regard for Canada, which he had visited many times, and was interested in many aspects of Canadian life. I recall in particular our discussion of Canada's experience in developing the loyalty of new Canadians without requiring them to sever their links with their countries of origin. This issue was of special interest to His Majesty because of Jordan's large population of Palestinian origin.

What was specially memorable for me was the love of the people of Jordan for their King. I was witness to this in 1992, when he returned from the United States after prolonged medical treatment. The streets were just filled with people from all over Jordan who, in a quite spontaneous way, came to Amman to show their happiness at his return and his recovery.

These scenes were repeated when the King first returned from the Mayo Clinic in 1999, after what appeared to be successful treatment. In cold, rainy weather, he insisted on responding to his people's welcome from an open car. Given his health, this may have been an unwise decision, but it was a reflection of his closeness to the Jordanian people.

## Canada World View

Will the King's accomplishments endure?

## Andrew Robinson

The King certainly laid the groundwork for continued Israeli-Jordanian relations, but these will not develop independent of the regional situation. The economic situation will be important and Jordan's friends will need to show their friendship in tangible ways. It has been very encouraging to see the warm signals of support coming from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other countries. ●

