

STATEMENT ON LEBANON

The recent tragic events in Lebanon are of concern to all Canadians, and I am sure all members of the House share the Government's sense of compassion for the many victims of the latest troubles. The Secretary of State for External Affairs has already stressed this great concern on several occasions. On March 31 Canada participated in the Security Council meeting on Lebanon and we expressed our support for the statement issued by the President of the Security Council at that time.

Mr. Speaker, what has been happening in the last month in Beirut is of course only the latest stage in the civil war which has rent that country for the last 14 years, and it cannot be seen in isolation. Throughout these events Canada's support for the sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity of Lebanon has been steadfast, and that remains the fundamental basis of our position. As part of this we have repeatedly supported the principle of the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon.

We believe, Mr. Speaker, that all Lebanese parties must make further efforts towards national reconciliation, and as the Secretary of State for External Affairs stated on March 30 we do not consider that violence is the route to national reconciliation. We have therefore called upon all the parties concerned to redouble their efforts to achieve national reconciliation.

Mr. Speaker, the complexity of the Lebanese problem hardly needs underlining, and it is known to have defeated the well meaning efforts of numerous outside parties. But this is no reason to stop trying.

This is why we have supported the efforts of the Arab League Ministerial Committee, led by the Foreign Minister of Kuwait, Shaik Sabah. Our support for his efforts has been conveyed directly to the Government of Kuwait, and we have urged the parties concerned, particularly Syria and the Lebanese parties, to cooperate with the Arab League efforts.

We also welcome the latest initiative by President Mitterrand, and the Prime Minister is communicating to President Mitterrand our support for this initiative and our willingness to be helpful.

Mr. Speaker, over the years, Canada has done its part to help alleviate the suffering of Lebanon and the Lebanese. Canada has given refuge to thousands of Lebanese who have chosen to make their homes with us, and we are proud of their contribution to our national life, which is indeed reflected in the composition of the membership of this house.