

Your Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs, distinguished guests:

On October 22, 1994, in Montreal, I had the pleasure and the honour of being welcomed by the Lebanese-Syrian Canadian Association of Quebec. The Association was celebrating its 75th anniversary, thus marking the richness and uniqueness of the ties between Canada and Lebanon. At this event, I took the opportunity to publicize the Government of Canada's decision to reopen its embassy in Beirut early in 1995.

Today, I am both proud and happy to be among you, here in Beirut, to fulfil this promise. Circumstances forced us to suspend our embassy's operations during one of the darkest periods of the war in 1985. Yet the unique relationship that exists between our two countries was clearly too important for this situation to continue. I would like to pay tribute today to Ms. Salwa Assily and the other members of the local staff for their exceptional loyalty and dedication in performing their duties from the Mayflower Hotel.

The winds of change are blowing in Lebanon. The most spectacular sign of change is the impressive reconstruction effort launched by the people of Lebanon and their government. This and many other reasons made it imperative for Canada to return to Lebanon, for the history of our relations teaches us that there is no substitute for the importance of human interaction.

Canada and Lebanon enjoy a truly special relationship that dates back to the arrival of Lebanese immigrants in Canada at the turn of the century; and it has grown since then. When Lebanon was in the throes of war, Canada opened its doors to tens of thousands of Lebanese refugees. These new arrivals have contributed to every aspect of Canadian life, whether in politics, in business or in the arts.

On this historic day, I am very happy to be accompanied by Senator Pierre de Bané and by Mac Harb, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, both of whom are of Lebanese origin.

Even though he is not Lebanese, our colleague, Senator Marcel Prud'homme, played a special role for years by promoting Canada's relations with the Arab world.

About 150 000 - or 60 per cent - of the Lebanese men and women who have settled in Canada have chosen to live in Quebec, some of them in my own riding. I am thus well aware of their achievements, and I salute them.

Many other Lebanese men and women have studied and worked in Canada, and then returned to Lebanon. Along with Canadians of Lebanese origin, they create a living bond between our two countries. In this regard, I am thinking particularly of the