

Government Response to the Report of the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Given our an open and honest political dialogue with Egypt, the Government does not hesitate to make representations to the Government of Egypt about human rights, the role of civil society and the need for democratization. The Government regularly monitors the situation on the ground in Egypt and consistently encourages Egypt to institute democratic reforms and to respect its obligations under international human rights law – particularly with regard to Egypt's efforts to curb political violence and religious extremism.

Such actions are often coordinated with like-minded embassies in Cairo, including through the Donor Assistance Group, which Canada co-chairs, and its Participatory Development and Good Governance subgroup, which acts as a lever in bringing pressure to bear on the Egyptian Government while encouraging meaningful dialogue between government institutions and civil society to move the social, economic and human rights agenda forward.

The Government intends to continue annual political consultations with Egypt, which provide a further forum for discussion of such issues. The Government will also continue to speak with a broad spectrum of civil society in Egypt and is exploring avenues for cooperation to make the Egyptian political and legal process more open and accountable. Recently established links between the Canadian Supreme Court and the Egyptian Constitutional Court will be a particularly important area of cooperation in this regard.

RECOMMENDATION 13

The Government of Canada should use the 50th anniversary in 2004 of the establishment of bilateral relations with Egypt to significantly upgrade Canada's capacity to carry out educational and cultural cooperation activities and exchanges within Egypt and benefiting the wider Arab region. In particular, the Canadian government in cooperation with the provinces should strongly support the Al-Ahram Canadian University project and should consider the feasibility of establishing a Canadian Cultural Centre in Cairo.

The 50th anniversary of bilateral representation has been marked by events in both countries, including the January 2004 visit to Cairo of Supreme Court Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin, and the visit in September to Ottawa by Egyptian Foreign Minister Abul Gheit. The year of celebratory events culminated in a conference on Canada-Egypt relations hosted by the Canadian Embassy in Cairo and Cairo University intended to expose Egyptian policy makers to Canada's important presence and role in Egypt and in the region.

Cultural and learning exchanges are set to increase as a result of new partnerships developed during the 2004 commemorative year, including for example a new partnership between the Alexandria Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec and Université de Montréal. The Government has emphasized activities which offer permanent benefits, such as book donations to schools and libraries, rather than one-off events. The Government recognizes the importance of long-term educational partnerships for both its learning and its commercial benefits. The Government also encourages such partnerships as a way of increasing Canada's visibility in Egypt, with one such example being the forthcoming opening of the Al Ahram Canadian University in 2005. Other such recent activities included a Canadian film festival and art exhibit