

In Saudi Arabia, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding on economic co-operation, thereby establishing a Canada-Saudi Arabia Joint Economic Committee, which is expected to hold its first meeting in Ottawa early this summer. I was pleased to hear from the Saudi Arabia Foreign Minister, His Royal Highness Prince Saud, of his Government's decision to open a resident Saudi diplomatic mission in Canada in the immediate future; a further confirmation of Saudi Arabia's wish to strengthen our bilateral ties. That my visit to that country was the fifth by a Canadian minister in the past two years demonstrates clearly that we reciprocate that wish.

In Iraq, we also confirmed our mutual will to establish closer trade and economic ties. A Canadian delegation has just returned from Baghdad where it completed negotiations on two agreements -- one covering trade and one dealing with economic and technical co-operation. The latter provided for the establishment of a joint economic commission, whose first meeting is also planned to take place later this year.

In my unfortunately too brief stay in Jordan, I had the opportunity to discuss with His Majesty King Hussein and Crown Prince Hassan their country's new five-year economic plan. I was impressed by the economic progress which is taking place in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. I suggested to the Jordanian authorities that, while bilateral economic exchanges with Jordan were still modest, it would be useful to have experts from our two countries meet in order to explore further opportunities for commercial and economic co-operation. This proposal was readily accepted, and in this context Canada will be officially represented at a symposium to be held on Jordan's new five-year plan in Amman at the end of May. I should say, moreover, how pleased we were to welcome the recent visit to Ottawa of Their Majesties, the King and Queen, as well as Prime Minister Rifa'i. Although the visit was brief and informal in nature, we did have an opportunity to discuss matters of interest to both Canada and Jordan and to further develop our very cordial relations.

In addition to our discussions on bilateral economic activities, I also took the opportunity in the capitals I visited to initiate a frank and continuing dialogue on the key international economic problems of mutual concern, such as energy, financial and monetary issues, matters in which the Arab countries have an increasingly important role. Moreover, I wished to review or define common areas of interest in the fields of aid and development.

In this context, I discussed multilateral trade and monetary questions and the prospects for the ongoing Conference on International Economic Co-operation. I attended one of its sessions immediately following my visit to the Middle East in my capacity as leader of the Canadian Delegation and as Co-chairman of the Conference and, given the fact that three of the countries I visited, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Egypt, are equally members of the Conference, I found a special interest in discussing with the Ministers immediately concerned the work of this Conference in the key fields of energy, raw materials, development and finance.