

## Minister visits Middle East capitals

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs Allan J. MacEachen paid an official visit to the Middle East from October 19 to 27. His itinerary included stops in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan and Israel.

As developments in the Middle East reached a particularly critical juncture, Mr. MacEachen's visit provided a timely opportunity for him to exchange views with the leaders of these countries on a number of regional issues, notably the situation in Lebanon, the Arab-Israeli dispute, the Palestinian situation and the question of Gulf security and the Iran-Iraq war.

Mr. MacEachen also discussed a variety of bilateral questions of interest to each of the host countries.

Arriving in the Syrian capital of Damascus October 19, Mr. MacEachen met with Syrian Foreign Minister Abdul-Halim Khaddam and, the following day, with President Hafez al-Assad.

### Lebanese reconciliation

In a press conference, Mr. MacEachen commented that he believed the process of Lebanese reconciliation was linked to outside factors, such as agreement between the Lebanese government and Syria, which is demanding the repudiation of last spring's Lebanese-Israeli troop withdrawal agreement.

Also at issue is the presence in Lebanon of the foreign forces of both Israel and Syria. In that connection, Canada's external affairs minister acknowledged that peace in the area depended on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon.



*Mr. MacEachen (left) meets with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo.*

While in Damascus, the minister also talked with Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt. Canadian officials noted that Mr. Jumblatt's views about the need to reform Lebanon's constitution to meet the country's changed ethnic and religious make-up were much the same as those expressed by Syrian President Assad. One difference, they said, was that Mr. Jumblatt regarded Syrian, as well as Israeli troops, in Lebanon as foreign forces that must be removed.

Mr. MacEachen flew to Beirut on October 21 to meet with Lebanese President Amin Gemayal at the Presidential Palace. He then travelled to Cairo where he met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Kamal Hassan Ali. His arrival in Cairo coincided with the bombing attack in Lebanon which killed US and French members of the multinational peacekeeping force and Mr. MacEachen expressed shock at the

incident. "We are all, certainly in Canada, appalled at this senseless act of indiscriminate violence..." he said. He extended Canada's deep sympathy to the United States, France and Lebanon "who have suffered such heavy loss of human life".

### Peacekeeping force

During a subsequent meeting with reporters, the minister stated that "peace does not seem to be an early prospect" and predicted that the reconciliation talks to take place in Geneva would undoubtedly be very difficult. Canada was not seeking a role in Lebanon, he emphasized, but indicated that it would consider participating in a peace force if it were organized under the auspices of the United Nations.

In Amman, Jordan, Mr. MacEachen met King Hussein. Before his departure from Jordan, the minister affirmed that the Canadian government considered that Jewish settlements in the territories occupied by Israel were "illegal and constitute an obstacle to peace" in the Middle East. After a brief tour of the West Bank of the Jordan River, the area occupied by Israel, he boarded his plane for Israel.

In Israel, the final stop on his tour, Mr. MacEachen met with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. Despite his criticism of Israeli policy *vis-à-vis* the West Bank, the minister told a news conference that relations between the two countries were sturdy enough to withstand such differences of opinion.

Mr. MacEachen also met with President Chaim Herzog and opposition leaders before leaving for Canada on October 27.



*In Jerusalem Mr. MacEachen (right) talks with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.*

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