

When discussing the Middle East conflict, there is perhaps an inevitable tendency to think in terms of two opposing sides. I cannot, however, ignore the fact that there is considerable diversity among the various Arab countries, and that despite their many similarities, there are among them important historical, cultural and economic differences. In my view it is important to keep in mind the differences, as well as the similarities, in order to arrive at a fuller appreciation of the diverse realities in the Middle East. It is only with such an appreciation that our bilateral relations with each of the countries can be developed in a truly meaningful way.

Thus, I thought it particularly important to establish a personal relationship with Arab leaders and I found this reflection reconfirmed by my visit to Cairo, the first stop on my itinerary. As the most populous of the Arab states, Egypt, which links two continents, occupies a key position in the Eastern Mediterranean; it has played in the last decades a paramount role in the politics of the Middle East and has a considerable influence in the developing world. This confluence of factors gives Egyptian statesmen a unique perspective, and I found my conversations with President Sadat and Foreign Minister Fahmy both stimulating and illuminating.

In bilateral terms, I found in Egypt general agreement that new emphasis must be given to Egypt-Canada relations in fields such as trade, investment, development and technical co-operation, as well as cultural affairs. The Egyptian economy appears on the threshold of a period of encouraging development which should provide the basis for broader economic exchanges. But Egypt remains a country with urgent needs for development assistance. I informed Foreign Minister Fahmy that, within the framework of our new international development strategy, active consideration would be given to providing Egypt with Canadian technical and financial assistance. Equally, development projects could be considered in conjunction with other bilateral or multilateral donors. Additionally, I authorized CIDA<sup>1</sup> to make a contribution of one million dollars to the special account of the UNDP<sup>2</sup> programme for the reconstruction of the Suez Canal region.

With respect to our bilateral economic activity, I found a receptive audience also in Jeddah, in Amman and in Baghdad and a reciprocal desire for closer relations. The leaders of these countries all expressed to me a keen interest in intensifying and expanding trade and economic co-operation with Canada, which they consider to have the expertise and capacity required to carry out projects in certain vital sectors of their development programmes; moreover, they regard Canada for a variety of other reasons to be an especially suitable partner for industrial co-operation.

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1. Canadian International Development Agency.
  2. United Nations Development Programme.