

between AFCAN, a Canadian company in the medical sector, and The Tripoli Hospital. This is but the beginning.

Canadian business people are interested in Lebanon because they speak the same language – the language of free and open markets. Lebanon remains perhaps the most open economy in the region, and offers a business environment in which our companies are most comfortable. In fact, I believe Lebanon will soon regain a prominent place as a regional centre for finance, trade and tourism.

Canada-Lebanon relations are indeed special, and they go beyond trade, important though it may be. Indeed, the human factor is the most profound element in our relations. With a quarter of a million Lebanese-Canadians, it is difficult to find anyone in Lebanon who does not have relatives or friends in Canada.

Senator Pierre De Bané and Mac Harb, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for International Trade, both present today, are Canadians of Lebanese descent and great contributors to Canadian society: they represent the qualities that the Lebanese-Canadian community brings to our national life. Senator Marcel Prud'homme, although not of Lebanese descent, has contributed greatly to the promotion of Canada's relations with the Arab world.

Canada is also a political friend of Lebanon's. Canada stands by its friends, and we will support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon as reflected in United Nations Security Council Resolution 425.

In the context of this resolution and the Ta'if Accord of 1989, Canada supports the progressive extension of the Lebanese government's authority over all of its territory, and the withdrawal of foreign troops from Lebanon.

We believe that the best way of ensuring the security of all the people of Lebanon, from north to south, and of the region as well, lies in a strong Lebanese government capable of exercising its authority throughout the country.

In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to the members of the Chamber of Commerce who assisted Canadian firms in recent years when our programs and services were not what they are today. Thank you for your support in these difficult times.

We need a stable, independent and prosperous Lebanon. That is why I am here today, and why I expect to be back soon.

Thank you.