

B) Multilateral Negotiations

In Moscow, in January 1992, the United States and Russia launched the next phase of the Madrid Peace Process. Foreign ministers and delegates from 36 countries, including countries from the Middle East, along with representatives from Europe, Japan, China and Canada, began a series of multilateral negotiations.

The purpose of the talks is to focus on issues of regional concern and to take concerted action in addressing them. The negotiations will likely take on a key role in co-ordinating assistance to support the Israel-PLO agreement.

Five working groups have been established to deal with areas of pressing concern:

- 1) Arms Control and Security;
- 2) Economic Development;
- 3) Refugees;
- 4) Water Resources; and
- 5) Environment.

Canada chairs the Refugee Working Group, whose mandate is to improve the lives of people displaced by the Arab-Israeli conflict. Canada hosted the first two meetings. Norway hosted the third, and the fourth met in Tunisia, October 12-14, 1993.

Canada also participates in the other four working groups, and hosted, in September, a special workshop on Maritime Confidence Building Measures, under the aegis of the Arms Control and Security Working Group.

Canada is also a member of the Multilateral Steering Group, which reviews the work of the five working groups and plans future meetings. The Steering Group met in Moscow in July, 1993.

Canada's Approach

As one of the non-regional parties participating in the multilateral phase of the peace process, Canada's principal aim has been to keep the peace process moving forward and to support bilateral agreements. Responsibility for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict ultimately rests with the parties involved in the bilateral negotiations. The multilateral negotiations are not a substitute for those talks.

However, the multilateral negotiations do offer an opportunity for the parties to understand the tangible benefits to be gained from an eventual overall political settlement. Canada, with its practical expertise in dealing with such issues as refugees, disarmament and water resource management, along with its longstanding peacekeeping experience in the Middle East and its positive relations with parties in the region, has contributed significantly to the peace process. The multilateral negotiations have also offered a unique opportunity for the adversaries in the conflict to make the personal contacts needed for progress in bilateral negotiations. It was through such contacts that Israelis and Palestinians initiated the discussions that led to their bilateral breakthrough.