

During my discussions on the Middle East conflict I addressed myself specifically to the Palestinian problem which has become recognized by the world community, and this unequivocally includes Canada, as an essential element in the search for a just and lasting settlement. Throughout my trip, including in Israel, I stressed this point and confirmed my conviction that unless the legitimate interests of the Palestinians were met, a just and lasting settlement could not be achieved. It has been the Canadian Government's view for some years now that these legitimate interests include the right of the Palestinian Arabs to be heard and to participate in all discussions and negotiations affecting their future. This, I suggest, is fully consistent with the "principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples" as enshrined in the very first article of the U.N. Canada continues to insist, however, that the internationally recognized rights in the area of other peoples and states be equally respected.

Insofar as the PLO itself is concerned, I explained to my hosts in the Middle East that Canada, which was a party neither to the conflict nor to the negotiations, did not consider it appropriate to pronounce itself on whether that organization should or should not be the sole representative of the Palestinian people. It certainly appears, however, that the PLO has emerged as the most prominent spokesman of the Palestinian people at this time. I have, of course, observed with interest the recent municipal elections on the West Bank and will follow with the closest attention the impact which their results may have on clarifying the Palestinian representation question.

While I am fully aware that the PLO has received considerable support within the international community, I find it equally noteworthy that all my Arab hosts who commented on Canada's attitude on the Palestinian representation question expressed full understanding for our position. Indeed one Arab Foreign Minister expressed to me his view which was that our stand on this matter was "a fair policy".

As you know, Canada has announced its candidacy for a seat on the United Nations Security Council for a two-year term beginning January 1, 1977. When we are elected, and there is every reason to believe we will be, we will be more deeply than ever involved in international efforts to grapple with the Middle East conflict, and our policy will come under even closer scrutiny. After my trip to the Middle East, and following my discussions with both Arab and Israeli leaders, I am convinced that our policy, which attempts to come to grips with and reflect the current realities, is able to withstand that scrutiny. While each of the two sides would, of course, welcome greater Canadian support for its own position, I am confident that each side will continue to acknowledge and respect Canada's objective and even-handed approach to the conflict. This is, of course, essential if our endeavours to make a positive contribution to a resolution of the problems are to be credible.