

five-year period, and our strengthened support for the peace program of UNRWA for its activities in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

Regional Economic Conference in Casablanca

The progress of the peace process is changing the trade picture in the Middle East. Our businesses must keep an eye on these changes. To do business in this region, it is increasingly necessary to be able to form partnerships with local firms that are familiar with markets and can monitor the rapid development of local economies.

At the end of next week, in Casablanca, I will have the opportunity to attend the first conference devoted to the economy of the Middle East and North Africa. The objective of this summit conference, which will be hosted by King Hassan of Morocco, is to consolidate the peace process in the Middle East by strengthening economic co-operation and development.

I have asked the Canadian business leaders who will accompany me to take part in the various technical workshops on the region's economic future, and to report to me on this region's potential for Canadian businesses. Their report will enable us to better target our trade activities and to better advise businesses on the most promising sectors.

Relations with Syria

Canada's Syrian community, with several thousand members who are proud of their country of adoption, is also a decisive factor in the promising future of our relations with Syria.

In June 1994, I had the pleasure of granting the request by Syrian authorities to appoint Mr. Fares Attar as Honourary Consul General of Syria in Montreal. I am sure that this appointment will make it easier for Canadians wishing to travel to Syria for personal, family or official reasons, or for tourism and trade.

Visits by Canadian missions have identified encouraging prospects for trade with Syria. These contacts allow the development of closer relations between Canada and its partners in the Middle East.

There have been promising developments in our relations with Syria in recent years. In the context of the realignment caused by the breakup of the former Soviet Union and the invasion of Kuwait, it is highly significant that a contingent of Canadian armed forces found itself alongside those of Syria during the Gulf crisis in 1991. As mentioned earlier, Canada has been active in Syria since 1974 by contributing to the UN forces on the Golan Heights.