

The sharing of knowledge and expertise also promotes the development of strong ties between countries. I am pleased to announce that CIDA will make more than \$5.5 million in development assistance funds available to Lebanon. Thanks in part to this new infusion of funds, our two governments will be working together on a project to support the reform of the Lebanese public sector. I have also increased the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives, which is designed to help NGOs [non-governmental organizations] take up the challenges of reconstruction and development. Finally, in my meeting yesterday with Prime Minister Hariri, I confirmed that Canada would be contributing \$4.8 million to the Lebanese Finance Ministry for its tax-system reform project.

The confidence that I feel is based on another remarkable fact: trade between our two countries continued to prosper even during the civil war. Canadian exports to Lebanon are flourishing, rising from less than \$8 million in 1990 to over \$44 million.

Allow me to say that, as a Canadian and a Quebecker, this visit is a real honour for me. Quebec is now home to most of our citizens of Lebanese origin. And Quebec accounts for 63 per cent of all Canadian exports to Lebanon as well as the bulk of our imports from Lebanon. With Lebanese exports to Canada in the order of \$4.5 million annually, this year's prospects are encouraging.

Of course, we know full well that trade is a two-way street and has to flourish in both directions. For this reason Canada and Lebanon recently negotiated and signed an agreement granting increased quotas for Lebanese textiles and clothing exports to Canada. I congratulate the Chamber of Commerce for its efforts on this file and the Director General of the Industrialists Association, Mr. Nabil Ladki, who participated in the negotiation of this agreement with Mrs. Aeltounian of the Chamber of Commerce. It is true what they say about the Lebanese: they are tough negotiators and they are persistent - qualities that we Canadians share and admire! In fact I can see no limit to the tremendous level of interest among the Canadian business sector in participating in the reconstruction of Lebanon.

This is Canada's sixth trade delegation to Lebanon since the election of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's government in 1993. Firms from across Canada have participated in the "Rebuild Lebanon" exposition. Both the federal and Quebec governments as well as the Canada-Arab Business Council have organized major trade missions to Lebanon. Participants in those events came from sectors of particular excellence in Canadian industry: health, construction and telecommunications, to name a few.

We can already see the fruits of their efforts. Earlier today I witnessed the signing of a \$23-million contract in Tripoli