

Canada's role

I think the most important contribution Canada can make in the search for a way out of this continuing conflict is to maintain our channels of communication with both sides. I was glad to see that in the brief which the Canada-Israel Committee (CIC) representatives left with me last November this kind of role was endorsed. In maintaining a balanced and principled point of view, we have to understand and respect the genuine interests and concerns of both sides in this conflict and to take them seriously into account.

I have had various occasions to talk with representatives of Israel and the Arab countries in my efforts to understand their point of view and to impress on them Canadian views.

Canada is well-placed to pursue these exchanges in efforts to build a peaceful world in which Israel and its Arab neighbours can live together in security. I am happy to say that in our contacts with Israel we have been able to speak openly and frankly together. Our bilateral relations have always been close and intimate. Much of the contact between our two countries, of course, takes place automatically and naturally at the private level, but our governments reap the benefits of the good rapport created in this way.

We have built on these private contacts and, over the years, have developed an extensive and perhaps unexpected framework of agreements and understandings to give further encouragement to co-operation in a wide variety of fields — trade, agriculture, industrial research, health, cultural relations and film-making. Our co-operation has even extended to tripartite co-operation as a means of bringing Israeli and Canadian experience to the service of mankind in developing countries.

Ministerial visits have been helpful in extending and deepening our relations with Israel in the past. The possibilities for such visits were more limited during the election periods in Canada and Israel, but a few did take place and the pace has picked up again.

It has been my wish for some time to experience, even if briefly, the unique atmosphere of Israel, which I know only at second-hand, so that I would be better placed in my discussion of Middle East issues. I hope I will have an opportunity to take up a long standing invitation to visit Israel in the not too distant future. There are a lot of things to discuss at this state in Canada-Israeli relations and in Israel's relations with the other countries of the Middle East and the world.

CIC's contribution

I think the CIC has made a vital contribution to this process of understanding. During my periodic talks with your representatives, the spotlight, of course, is usually on the Canadian government's perceptions of the problems of the Middle East and its policies on these issues. I dare say, however, that the CIC also has a keen interest in the perceptions and policies of the Israeli government, particularly as they impinge