

A visit to Lebanon was also included in my initial programme and, while planning progressed for my trip, I was following the situation in that unhappy country on a day-to-day basis. Unfortunately, it was clear by the time I left Canada that the conditions prevailing in Lebanon made it impossible to carry out a successful visit there. This was a great disappointment, particularly because it was caused by a tragic and bloody civil war which has been the source of much pain and suffering in that once peaceful and prosperous country. I am hopeful that recent events on the political level indicate a willingness to seek a settlement through negotiations rather than through violence, and that a modus vivendi, respecting the rights of all elements of Lebanese society, can be worked out that will put an end to the strife.

Despite this unavoidable gap in my programme, I consider that my first official visit to the Middle East was an important step in the process of expanding and deepening our relations with the Arab countries in that area. Tonight, I should like to share with you my impressions of the countries I visited and to outline some of the discussions I had with their leaders.

An important purpose in undertaking this tour was to reiterate to my hosts that Canada continues to be deeply concerned by the tragic Middle East conflict and that our policy in this extremely complex dispute aims at balance and objectivity, and, more importantly, rests on principle. I tried to make clear that Canada, while not a party to the dispute, does what it can to make a positive contribution to a possible peaceful solution by its peacekeeping activities in the area. I think our general acceptability as peacekeepers is an indication of the confidence in our impartiality that is placed upon us by the contending parties. I was particularly pleased by King Hussein's comment that "we feel that if there is a description that could be given to nations -- and that would be the peacemakers -- Canada obviously comes at the head of the list..."

Canada presently participates in both the UNEF¹ operation in the Sinai and in UNDOF² on the Golan Heights. We contribute about 850 personnel to the operation in the Sinai theatre and about 150 personnel to UNDOF. Our contribution is in the form of logistics support and we share this role with Poland, a Warsaw Pact country. Of special concern at the moment is the UNDOF peacekeeping operation, since its mandate is due to be renewed, with the consent of the parties concerned, at the end of this month. It is our hope and our expectation that the mandate will be renewed as scheduled since it is our firm belief that UNDOF is contributing in a most significant fashion to the stabilization of tensions in the region and therefore, to prospects for an eventual negotiated solution. It is to be pointed out that UNDOF not only serves stability in the region by the interposition of a UN presence between Syria and Israel, but that its mandate (as the mandate of UNEF) includes arrangements for the observation and inspection of the limited forces zones on each side of the area of separation.

1. United Nations Emergency Force.