

Canada and the Middle East Peace Process

Canada is a strong supporter of the Middle East peace process, an active participant in multilateral negotiations and a significant contributor to assistance programs in the region. Canada's involvement in international efforts to secure peace in the Middle East dates back almost 50 years, and is highlighted by Lester B. Pearson's efforts during the Suez Canal crisis in 1956 that won him the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Madrid Peace Process

Bilateral Negotiations. The Madrid peace process was launched by the United States and the former Soviet Union in 1991 in an effort to find a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. For the first time since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, leaders of three Arab countries along with Israel and the Palestinian people were brought together to address the question of peace. This process produced a series of bilateral negotiations between Israel and its neighbouring countries — Jordan, Syria and Lebanon — and with the Palestinians.

These negotiations have been long and difficult, reflecting the complexity of the issues and the compromises that must be made to ensure a durable peace. The Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles, signed in Washington in 1993; the subsequent interim agreements extending Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza, signed in 1994 and 1995; and the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty, signed in 1994; were momentous breakthroughs.

Multilateral Negotiations. In Moscow in 1992, the United States and Russia launched the second phase of the Madrid peace process. This involved foreign ministers and delegates from 36 countries — including representatives from the Middle East, Europe, Japan, China and Canada.

Multilateral negotiations complement the bilateral negotiations but do not substitute for them. Five working groups have been established: arms control and regional security, regional economic development, refugees, water resources, and the environment. To date, Syria and Lebanon have chosen not to participate until greater progress has been made in the bilateral negotiations.

Canada's Role and Contribution

Canada is a strong proponent of a negotiated solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and fully supports the process of bilateral negotiations. Its main objective is to help the countries of the Middle East develop ways of co-operating with each other.