

CANADA'S RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE

I am happy at the opportunity this annual conference gives me to resume the contacts with the Canada-Israel Committee that I used to enjoy when I was Minister for External Affairs between 1974 and 1976. Today I want to talk about the Canada-Israel relationship and the Arab-Israeli dispute. I do not intend to cover all the aspects of these very broad subjects since I have just recently put a full statement on the record of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs on February 17 and I returned to the subject yesterday before the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence. I want simply to highlight some of the issues involved.

Our interest in Israel is a special one. There is a closeness with Israel that goes back many years. We supported the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and established our diplomatic mission there in 1954. As a reflection of our interest in Israel, our embassy is now about the sixth largest diplomatic mission in the country.

Over the years, Canada has developed a solid relationship with Israel and a friendship that is based on understanding and frankness. I am sure these have given us greater insight into the aspirations and preoccupations of Israelis as well as helping Israelis, in turn, to understand how Canadians view Israel. The Canada-Israel Committee's contribution to the dialogue is very much valued.

The official visit I made to Israel in 1976 brought home to me the vitality of Israeli democracy and the enthusiasm that is typical of Israelis. These are not things that are easily forgotten. Nor is the sense of history with which Israelis live their daily lives. I found memorable the ancient history captured in the holy city of Jerusalem. Then there was the more recent history of the Holocaust which is recorded at Yad Vashem so that none may forget the horrors that man has perpetrated against his fellow man. Finally, there was the daily history being written in the constant confrontation between Arabs and Israelis.