

Contact is normally made by telephone, though telephone facilities sometimes become overloaded.

All international airports in the area, with the exception of Damascus and Cairo, remain open for scheduled flights. As a consequence, no build-up of stranded tourists wishing to return home has developed except in Cairo where on October 10, 1973, approximately 100 Canadian visitors were waiting for transportation from the area. This number is gradually being reduced, as tourists, with embassy assistance, obtain bookings on ships sailing from Alexandria and on buses to Benghazi. Arrangements are now being completed to enable any Canadian tourists who remain from this number, or residents who wish to do so, to leave on a ship which the Americans have chartered. Our embassies in Cairo and Tel Aviv have reported that they are not aware of any injuries to Canadians in their area and that all whom they have been able to contact are safe and well. All Canadians who wished to do so have already left Syria.

● (2020)

The present situation in the Security Council does not encourage us to envisage a Canadian initiative at the UN at this time. This does not mean that we remain inactive. The views of the Canadian government about the road to peace in the Middle-East as I have outlined them here and in previous statements have been conveyed to all the governments concerned. I personally made them known to the ambassadors of Arab countries represented in Ottawa and the Ambassador of Israel, as well as the Ambassador of the Soviet Union.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) took the opportunity to speak to Chinese leaders and urge them to use their influence for peace. Our ambassadors abroad have been very active conferring with representatives of foreign governments, and special instructions have been issued to our ambassadors in the Middle-East to present these views to the governments of Israel, Egypt and Syria in particular. We will continue the vigorous activity. At the same time, we are maintaining our long-standing embargo on Canadian arms to parties in the Middle-East conflict.

I return to what I said at the beginning about Canadian sympathies for our fellow human beings who are caught up in this tragic situation. We want to see the citizens of Israel and of all the Arab countries live out their lives in peace and security without constant fear of another war. We want the refugees to have a settled home instead of living out their existence in frustration and plotting. We therefore urge with all the emphasis we can that there be a ceasefire as soon as possible, followed by immediate steps along the path toward a settlement negotiated by the parties to the conflict which is fair and just to all concerned.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Wagner (Saint-Hyacinthe): Mr. Speaker, during the first hours of the present parliament, we were deep into the Viet Nam problem; in the first hours of our return in this House, we are deeply involved in the Middle East conflict. We can no more remain indifferent to the conflict opposing Israel and the Arab states than to the tragedy in Viet Nam.

Arab-Israeli War

[English]

Mr. Speaker, the situation in the Middle East is one that concerns not only Canadians but all peoples who truly understand the potential that any regionalized international conflict has for spreading its effects across the world. The concern that Canadians share, regardless of where their private sympathies may lie with reference to the principals locked in conflict, makes it essential that this parliament provide the nation with a forum for a discussion and airing of the issues. That is why we called for this debate to take place.

I want to assure the minister that, as my leader indicated in his statement of this afternoon, our party is prepared to support any reasonable efforts on the part of the government to bring about a ceasefire, hopefully related to a continuing round of serious negotiations with reference to the material disputes in the Middle East.

Our purpose in requesting this debate is to ensure that the government has a full reading of the sentiment and concerns of this minority parliament as it prepares what initiatives it can take to deal with this tragic situation. I believe it is fair to say that most Canadians would prefer that our government reflected in a balanced sense our general concern about restoring a lasting peace to the Middle East. Yet I feel compelled to indicate that as a result of the UN observer-reported violations on the party of Egypt and Syria of the 1967 ceasefire lines, and the responsibility this violation must bear for the present crisis, it may be neither appropriate nor possible for Canada to maintain a perfect sense of balance in the present difficulties. Canada was a party to the UN vote that created the State of Israel and must therefore share the commitment expressed by the United Nations that Israel had a right to exist.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wagner: That right must remain the cornerstone of our pursuit of peace and conciliation in the area. I do not believe that there can be any equivocation on this matter. Nevertheless, those who care about Israel's right to exist should understand that that right is strengthened by peace and weakened by war. That is why many friends of Israel have counselled a more conciliatory attitude on her part at times, and that is why many still believe that the ultimate securing of peace and an existence without war will depend on Israel's ability to sue for peace and continue that pursuit regardless of the odds. Perhaps, as friends of Israel, Canadians expect more of her and feel that she can and should take the first and perhaps the longest step if peace is to become a reality.

Yet it becomes clear that there are powers that do not want peace in the Middle-East and are determined to stand in its way at high cost to the region and to the world. If a true peace in the Middle-East results only from a lasting settlement, surely the basis for peace must be the desire not to make war. That is often a product of a carefully maintained military balance. Those interested in peace must of necessity be concerned about that balance and its maintenance.

The decision reached by Egypt and Syria must relate to some sensing on their part that somehow the balance was tipped in their favour. Be that the actual case or not, that