Canada Weekly

Secretary of State for External Affairs tours Middle East

In Cairo on January 12, on the first day of a ten-day tour of the Middle East, Secretary of State for External Affairs Allan MacEachen stated that "active consideration" was being given to the provision by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) of bilateral technical and financial assistance for Egyptian development projects. In addition, said Mr. MacEachen, he had authorized CIDA to contribute $1 million to the United Nations Development Program for the reconstruction of the Suez Canal region.

During his stay in Egypt, Mr. MacEachen and his delegation met with President Anwar Sadat, Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy and other Egyptian officials. Commenting on Mr. Fahmy's acceptance of Mr. MacEachen's invitation to visit Canada, he said that he hoped it would take place shortly. There was general agreement by both countries, Mr. MacEachen added, "that a new impetus must be given to Egypt/Canada relations in other fields such as trade, investment, development and technical co-operation, as well as cultural affairs". On the Canadian side, he stated, Egypt had been perceived in terms of the conflict that had marked the recent history of the Middle East. "Fortunately, recent political developments in this region, as well as changing perceptions in our two countries, will enable us to overcome this handicap," he said.

At a news conference the following day, President Sadat declared that he would like Canada to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole representative of the Palestinian people in their conflict with Israel. Mr. MacEachen replied that Canada had made no decision on who should represent the Palestinian people, adding that such a decision should be left to the Palestinians themselves. He believed that the Palestinians should be represented at any talks dealing with the Middle East crisis.

Discussions between the Egyptian and Canadian officials included developments in the Middle East and bilateral relations.

Relations with Egypt

Canada has long enjoyed friendly relations with Egypt. The two countries first exchanged ambassadors in 1955.

Canadian trade with Egypt is fairly limited; exports have increased from $13.1 million in 1973 to $14 million in 1974. In the first six months of 1975 they amounted to $6.3 million. The majority of these exports were raw materials, foodstuffs, and some industrial goods. Egyptian exports to Canada, mostly cotton yarns, range from $0.5 million to $0.75 million a year.

Canada is the destination for some 700 Egyptian immigrants each year.

Canadian official visits to Egypt have been limited, although several delegations visited Egypt in the past year — the Minister of National Defence last autumn, representatives from the National Defence College and the Deputy Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce in April 1975. The official spokesman for President Sadat, Ambassador Tashin Bashir, visited Canada September 25 – October 3 as an "opinion former" under the Canadian visiting journalists program to attend a seminar on the Middle East at Laval University, Quebec.

Saudi Arabia

During his stay in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the next stop on his tour, the Secretary of State for External Affairs signed a bilateral memorandum of agreement on commercial co-operation. He met with Crown Prince Fahd and with Foreign Minister Prince Saud and other government officials.

In a departing statement on January 15, Mr. MacEachen explained the purpose in visiting countries of the Middle East — "to obtain at first hand an appreciation of the problems, achieve-