

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I first of all express my pleasure at having been invited to address the Tenth Annual Convention of the Canadian Arab Federation, particularly as I was prevented last year by a previous engagement from fulfilling my intention of speaking at your annual meeting. I recall, Mr. President, that that convention was held in the city of Toronto of which you are the articulate representative on the governing body of your organization. I have learned with interest that this is the first time that your annual sessions are held in a Canadian western city, and I interpret this as a well-deserved homage to the more than 10,000 Canadians of Arab origin who have elected to make Edmonton their place of residence.

I also take it as confirmation of your Federation's aspiration to represent all Canadians of Arab origin; I am therefore delighted to be provided with such an appropriate forum to pay a personal tribute to the tens of thousands of my countrymen of Arab origin or descent who, in their diverse capacities and walks of life, in the academic halls, in the fields of science and technology or in the House of Commons as well as in Provincial Parliaments, have made and are making invaluable contributions to the building of Canada while adding to the rich diversity of our culture, where all our friends and visitors can find something of their homeland.

In this context, the topic you have chosen for this year's convention, that is, "Strengthening Ties between Canadian and Arab Peoples", is most appropriate, as well as being very timely. It is perhaps not sufficiently appreciated by the public that the Government of Canada is fully committed to developing and accelerating that process. Indeed, one of the primary purposes of my visit to the Middle East in January of this year was to reaffirm the ties that already exist between Canada and the Arab states in the area, and to discuss important new agreements and links which hold considerable promise for the expansion of our relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, to name only three of the countries which I was privileged to visit for the first time. My visit also served to demonstrate to the Canadian public the importance the Government attaches to the strengthening of these links.

My itinerary was determined by the kind invitations of my hosts and brought me to the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Republic of Iraq and the State of Israel. I had the privilege of meeting with Heads of State or of Government, and in addition I engaged in extensive discussions with my counterparts and with many other senior Ministers.