

Mr. Chairman of the organizing committee for the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the Association Canadienne Libanaise Syrienne du Québec, Mr. President of the Association, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am pleased to join you tonight in celebration of the 75th anniversary of your association. It is the living expression of the very first ties that developed between Canada and the Middle East in the early 1900s, ties that have become stronger in recent decades with the influx of Lebanese who have found in Canada a refuge from the troubles that have afflicted their beautiful country. The contribution that the members of your community have made to our cultural, business, religious and political life is valuable to all Canadians. There is no area of Canadian life that does not benefit considerably from the energetic and creative activities of your members.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to take the opportunity that I have been given tonight to provide a quick overview of the role that Canada has played and will continue to play in the Middle East, especially in the peace process and the gradual stability that is being established in Lebanon.

Bilateral and Multilateral Components - Canada's Role

Canada participates in the five working groups created in the wake of the Madrid Conference of 1991, which marked the launch of the Middle East peace process. One of the Government of Canada's future priorities will be, among other things, to support as part of the peace process, future security arrangements on the border between Syria, Lebanon and Israel by applying Security Council Resolution 242 on the Golan Heights and Resolution 425 on southern Lebanon.

I think Canada is well prepared to play a role in these countries as a result of its traditional contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations in the Middle East and other corners of the world. Canada has been active in Lebanon since 1954 to supervise the truce in Israel, and contributed to the force in southern Lebanon in 1978. Moreover, Canada has contributed to the United Nations force on the Golan Heights in Syria since 1974.

Meanwhile, we will continue to support the efforts of our Israeli, Syrian and Lebanese friends to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. My latest contacts at the UN with my counterparts in the region strengthened my conviction that they would achieve this goal. There is widespread awareness in the Middle East that peace and individual interests have become inseparable.

The role assigned to Canada by the international community involves the Working Group on Refugees, which has been chaired by my Assistant Deputy Minister for Africa and the Middle East since