

It is a long process -- we have no doubts about that. We also know that nothing in the 44 years of the existence of the State of Israel has ever been easy.

But that is not grounds for giving up or not trying. We do not accept that hostility and mistrust cannot be turned around, even after centuries. We are prepared to be hopeful in starting down the elusive road that will eventually lead to peace.

We chose to be optimistic, and we have reasons for such optimism. The late Menachem Begin found a road to peace with the late President Anwar Sadat of Egypt. They had no map, they had no compass -- only the will to find a way.

Can we not also take inspiration from the courage of the Israelis during the SCUD attacks of the Gulf War, when they repressed a normal response to retaliate, in the interests of a long-term peace?

History is most often made when people "break the mould." If the norm is hatred and retaliation, then history will be made by those who develop new respect between themselves, and a willingness to find new ways to resolve differences besides the use of violence.

That is why Canada supports the bilateral peace process, and that is why Canada clearly recognizes that progress made in the working groups is no substitute for resolution of bilateral issues. We are hopeful that both tracks will ultimately prove beneficial.

You will recall that Canada chose to stand with Israel when the SCUD missiles rained on Tel Aviv. You will be glad to know that the remarkable team who staffed our mission to Israel during those difficult days was recently awarded, by myself, a consular award of merit.

Today, we stand with Israel again -- along with the United States, Russia and others -- in the hope of finding a peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

There is one final issue that I want to address, and that is my optimism for our own country -- Canada.

When I addressed this Congress in Montreal in May 1989, First Ministers were in the slow but deliberate process of ratifying a package of constitutional changes on which they had reached agreement in principle at Meech Lake in April 1987.

A scant 13 months later, the so-called Meech Lake Accord had unravelled, and Canada was thrown onto a roller coaster of uncertainty that has continued until this day.