

Statement by Minister on Middle East

nationbuilding in 20 years. In Egypt I saw a nation where the evidences of ancient glory are very much present, contrasting cruelly with the present-day struggle to evolve a better standard of living for its people.

The situation in the Middle East today is tragic. There is so much to be done in that part of the world and the will and technology are there. The tragedy is that in so many of the countries the resources needed for development are tied up in an arid confrontation which threatens to burst into violent conflict.

I left the Middle East with a profound sense of disquiet. Effective negotiation is not an immediate prospect. Escalation of the conflict is an immediate danger. In these circumstances, perhaps the best role for Canada to play in the foreseeable future is that of an understanding, compassionate, and objective observer, ready to assist if and when there is a specific task for us to undertake at the instance of both sides.

• (2:20 p.m.)

Let us hope that notwithstanding the present difficulties, counsels of moderation will prevail, and that some day, somehow, peace will come to the Middle East.

It would not be appropriate in a statement on motions to review in detail the bilateral discussions we had in each capital. There are great trading opportunities, particularly with Iran and Israel, and some important possibilities with the United Arab Republic. All three countries are eager for increasing contact with us. Perhaps one of the ways in which we can help is to be more of a presence in the Middle East, a part of the world that needs friends and cherishes friendship.

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Fairweather: There is no need for applause; I have not been away anywhere.

We welcome the minister back to Canada and to Parliament. I am sure he would agree that most Canadians expect two things in the pursuit of our policy toward the Middle East. The first is the right of the state of Israel to exist in the community of the world. The second is the solution of the refugee problem which has plagued the ingenuity of statesmen but, more important, has caused severe hardship and privation to the people concerned. One author stated that the symbol of the twentieth century, he suspects, will prove to

[Mr. Sharp.]

be the refugee. The people of Israel have more reason than most to know that this is true.

The minister speaks of his profound sense of pessimism. We can only hope that this will prove not to be justified because we recognize that war is no longer an acceptable way to solve conflicts between men.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, we also would like to welcome the minister back to the House. We are pleased that he was able to visit that part of the world which, as he said and as we all know, is of vital concern to world peace. The situation in the Middle East at present constitutes the greatest threat to world peace. I think the minister must feel sometimes that their internal problems seem almost insoluble, but because the peace of the world depends on it they must be solved.

I am glad to note that the minister concentrated in his statement upon the United Nations. It may well be that the agreement of the two super-powers, the United States of America and the U.S.S.R., is necessary to a solution of this problem, but the solution must be within the framework of international order.

One of the things that some members of the House, including myself, who were in New York recently at the United Nations were told when we were discussing peacekeeping was that the eventual solution of this problem would require an enlarged and enhanced peacekeeping force. We think that perhaps the greatest contribution Canada could make, as the minister's statement seems to indicate, would be to assist in the provision of such a force when and if it can be used in these countries.

I join the hon. member for Fundy-Royal in urging once again an increased effort to deal with the festering sore of the refugees, which is essential to the solution of this problem.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, like the two members who spoke previously, I shall say that we are also pleased by the return to Canada of the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp). However, as he confessed that during his trip to the Middle East, he had no solution to offer nor any proposal to make, I wonder what business he had going to that part of the world. In my opinion, it would have been rather difficult, for a country that contributed to