

When I addressed the annual conference of the Canada-Israel Committee just over a year ago, I observed that I was looking forward to visiting the Middle East again, including Israel where I had last been in 1976. As you well know I was able to make my planned visit to the region last October. I would like today to share with you at least some of the impressions I brought back from this area, for I'm quite aware that developments there are of great interest and concern to you as they are to me.

Of course my trip was one which recalled many happy associations from the past, and in this sense was an eminently rich and rewarding experience. There was, of course, also another side: a sharpened awareness of the frustrating complexity of the troubles with which the leaders and the inhabitants of the area have so long had to live. This was driven home to me again, both by what I saw in the countries I visited, and during the discussions I had with my hosts in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Let me speak first of the pleasurable aspects. Prominent among them was the time I spent in Israel, an occasion to sense again the dynamism and vitality of this young nation with which Canadians have been so intimately associated since its birth. I found the recollections of the past no less poignant, and the energy with which the people of Israel face the future in no way diminished. This vigour and dynamism cannot fail to serve as a source of inspiration to Canadians and citizens of other countries who visit Israel.

I also found, as I had confidently expected, that the friendship and understanding which have always inspired relations between our two countries and peoples remain healthy and vigorous. Fundamental to our relationship is the unchanging and unquestionable commitment of Canada to the security and well-being of the state of Israel, to its right to share a peaceful existence in the Middle East with its Arab neighbours.

Of course our relations, relations between Canada and Israel, have evolved and expanded tremendously since those early days after 1948 when the regional political dimension, indeed the very survival of Israel, almost totally dominated our mutual pre-occupations. The friendly and forward-looking discussions which I was able to have with Prime Minister Shamir reflected the breadth and stability of the Canada-Israel relationship. While we spoke a good deal, naturally enough, about the current troubles of the region, and especially the relentless violence in Lebanon, we found cause for some satisfaction with the steady growth of economic relations, technical co-operation and cultural exchanges between our two