

Less prominent but no less important has been our support to Israel by encouraging other countries such as Nigeria, India and Vietnam to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

Also attracting less attention, but certainly no less important, is a trilateral agreement signed in October 1989, whereby Canada defrays half the costs of training participants from the Third World who come to Israel to learn modern techniques in agriculture and rural development.

All of these actions build legitimacy -- and they build confidence.

These are exactly the objectives of the negotiations on Middle East peace: the bilateral round that began in Madrid last October and the multilateral round inaugurated in Moscow in January on arms control, water, economic development, the environment and refugees.

Canada is pleased to "hold the gavel" for the Working Group on Refugees, which held its first meeting in Ottawa last week. We regret that three major participants in the bilateral negotiations, Syria, Lebanon and Israel, chose not to attend these initial meetings. But some initial progress was made.

The role Canada has taken on is the most sensitive in the multilateral round. It is worth noting that Canada was specifically asked by the two co-sponsors of the peace process, the United States and Russia, to take on this difficult task.

Canada was given direct assurances in Moscow and subsequently by all the major bilateral participants of their support for Canada in this capacity, including assurances to me personally by Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy.

I accepted this role for Canada because I believe that we can legitimately contribute to the peace process, based on our reputation and skills as an "honest broker," especially in the Middle East and especially on refugee issues.

We are not naïve, nor are we starry eyed in our expectations.

In the Jewish tradition, you have a call to action that essentially says, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"

As Canadians, in our brief 125 years of existence, we have responded before to calls to action when peace and stability were at stake.

Canadians are believers in peace. If Canada does not respond to a call for peace, who will?