

Rabbi Plaut, Your Excellency Ambassador Shalev and distinguished dignitaries at the head table, ladies and gentlemen,

May I begin by thanking you for the kind invitation to speak to you today. As you know, I spoke at the Beth Tzedec Synagogue in Toronto on February 26; on March 11 I met with representatives of the Canada-Israel Committee and only last Monday I had a meeting with representatives of the Canadian Jewish Congress. In the course of these dialogues, it has been possible to deal with quite a range of issues of interest to you and of interest to me. In the course of the meetings with the Canada-Israel Committee and the Canadian Jewish Congress to which I have just referred we were able to deal with in some detail eight subjects of interest which will be of continuing concern to me and to you as we move ahead along the path that was so eloquently described for us by your Chairman.

Today's luncheon provides a further opportunity to continue our dialogue on issues which are of particular concern to the Jewish community and if, in my comments today, I do not deal with all the issues of interest to you, you will understand that they have been live subjects already under discussion and will be under discussion between us in the future.

What I do want to do in my remarks at this luncheon is to mention my visit to Israel last January and particularly my discussions with the Israeli leaders. My visit to Israel was a reaffirmation of the importance we attach to Canada-Israel relations in the bilateral sphere and a reminder in the context of my Middle East visit that we remain solidly behind Israel in insisting on a just and peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict, a just and peaceful solution, which recognizes and respects Israel's basic rights. There are, of course, a great many official and unofficial links between Canada and Israel which attest to the closeness of our relations, and I considered that an official visit by the Secretary of State for External Affairs was overdue after an interval of almost seven years. Moreover, I wanted to get to know the Israeli leaders on a personal basis and discuss with them a number of points that are of interest internationally and bilaterally.

I should add that I also had personal reasons for wishing to go to the Holy Land because of my interest in the many religious and historical sites which are such a vital part of our common heritage. Furthermore, I wanted to observe at first hand some of the new types of community that the Israelis have so successfully created and obtain some insight into the reasons why these new ways of social organization have not only flourished in their own setting but also provided so many of Israel's most dynamic citizens and leaders.