

STATEMENT DISCOURS

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NOTES FOR A ADDRESS
BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
THE HONOURABLE MARK MACGUIGAN,
TO THE
CANADIAN ARAB SOCIETY OF WINDSOR,
WINDSOR,
MARCH 20, 1982

Exactly a hundred years ago this year, a 19-year-old youth landed in Montreal as Canada's first Arab immigrant. He was Abraham Bounadere from Zahle, a Lebanese village from which many of our Windsor people have come. Because he did not come through Ellis Island like the forefathers of our chairman of the evening, Professor Jim Peters, he was not discouraged from settling here under his own name. By 1901, there were about 2,000 Arab immigrants in Canada, and today there are between 70,000 and 80,000 Canadians of Arab origin. Among these is my colleague and close associate, the Honourable Pierre De Bané, the Minister of State for External Relations.

What does it mean to be an Arab? I am sure that to many, perhaps to some here, it conjures up images of nomads, deserts, sheiks, tents and perhaps lovely dancing girls. But it could just as well bring to mind such contributions to civilization as algebra, the decimal system, medicine, chemistry, geography, astronomy or art. In my own original discipline of philosophy, Arab thinkers made a particularly large contribution. In fact, knowledge of the Greek philosopher Aristotle came down to the Christian Middle Ages through Arab hands.

Clearly, physical and racial characteristics do not provide a valid basis for defining Arab ethnicity. Nor does religion, despite the common but incorrect belief that all Arabs are Muslim. The only objective criterion of Arab ethnicity is Arabic language and culture. Thus all Arabs share essentially the same language, myths, music, art, cuisine and customs, modified only by regional differences.

Canada's formal links with the Arab World go back to 1953. In that year, we established diplomatic relations with Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and opened up a mission in Beirut covering all three of these countries.

Since then our relations with the Arab countries have grown and we now have missions not only in Lebanon but in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. Later this year we will be opening a new mission in Jordan. This has been one of my personal priorities since becoming Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Where we do not have diplomatic missions, our interests are covered by other Canadian missions in the area and Canadian officials visit these countries regularly.

The broadening Canadian diplomatic network in the area reflects the growing importance of the Arab countries in the world and our acknowledgement of the impact which events in the Middle East can have on our own economic prosperity and security.

We have come a long way since 1953 but we have to make up for lost time. The Middle East is important to Canada. There are ethnic, religious and historical interests in the region which help promote a natural contact between Canada and the Arab countries. The impact of Arab immigration to Canada has been felt not only in the larger cities such as Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver but throughout Canada -- in Ottawa, Quebec City, Sudbury, Calgary, Edmonton, Hamilton, London and here in Windsor as well.

Greater personal interaction between Canada and the Arab World has resulted from the growing number of visitors from the region to Canada -- about 28,000 each year -- and Canadian skilled personnel in the Arab countries. There are, for instance, some 5,000 Canadians now living in Saudi Arabia.

We are moving forward in the field of education co-operation with several countries in the Middle East, e.g.: negotiations are under way with Jordan for a government-to-government arrangement which would give blessing to specific projects and we look forward to a successful conclusion in the not too distant future.

Several Canadian universities are in the process of establishing links with universities in Saudi Arabia which might result in exchanges of teachers and students and co-operation in research projects. The federal government has encouraged the universities in their efforts and our Embassy in Jeddah and officials of the Department of External Affairs have co-operated with them from the time first contacts were established.

Developments of this kind which increase the interchange in the developing North/South dialogue are of particular interest to Canada.

When we turn to opportunities for economic co-operation, oil always comes to mind and it is important. But Canada's dependence on Middle East oil is far less than that of other countries. There are many other sides to our economic relationship with the Arab World and the opportunities are considerable. In the past year, for example, our exports to the Middle East have shot forward by more than 50%. They include a high proportion of manufactured goods and technical services. We have also been highly successful in engineering, consulting and planning. The potential for more trade exists in such areas as transportation and communications especially in the key markets of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt and Libya. We are developing these prospects.

Unfortunately, it has been international conflict which has brought Canada, as a peacekeeper, even closer to the countries of the Middle East over the years.

In the on-going dispute between Israel and the Arab States, there are limits to what a country like Canada can do. All the same, Canada has made a major contribution to peacekeeping. No other country has been so deeply and continuously involved. This involvement began with the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in 1948, then the United Nation Emergency Force in the Sinai in 1956. If we include Cyprus, we can also mention the United Nations Force in Cyprus in 1964. We can also refer to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in 1978. Canada's peacekeepers are still in the area today in the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force on the Golan Heights and in UNTSO.

Our presence in the Middle East has brought Canadians close to the tragedy of the Palestinian people. Over the years, there has been a consistent effort by Canada to meet the most urgent needs of the refugees who have been uprooted by war and forced to live in camps. We understand the need for help and we have responded.

Canada has been one of the largest donors to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in the Near East and UNRWA's efforts to meet the needs of the Arab Palestinian refugees. Over the years we have contributed more than \$64 million. In 1981, we increased our contribution by 30% to over \$7 million and we have pledged \$8.1 million in 1982, subject to Parliamentary approval.

As long as the Arab-Israeli dispute goes on, there will be a continuing need for the kind of practical and immediate help which UNRWA provides in the areas of relief, health and education.

Unfortunately, it looks as though the Arab-Israeli dispute will continue as a source of tension, instability and unpredictability in the area for some time to come.

The possibilities open to a country like Canada to make a contribution to a political settlement in such circumstances should not be exaggerated. Probably the most useful thing we could do would be to maintain and develop channels of communications with the parties involved so that we can bring a different and perhaps helpful perspective to the problems they face.

With this in mind, Canada has traditionally pursued a balanced policy between the Arabs and Israelis. We see merit in many of the arguments put forward by both sides. However, we have avoided taking positions on what the ultimate outcome should be of the negotiations that will have to take place between the parties concerned if there is ever to be a settlement.

This means that we have declined to give our support to attempts by either side in the dispute to prejudge the outcome of the eventual negotiations. Our objection to such attempts applies whether they be unilateral actions on the ground or resolutions in international fora that seek support for eventual negotiating positions.

We have tried to convince both sides of the advantages of the political, rather than the military approach to the resolution of their dispute.

Our position is solidly based on Security Council Resolution 242 with its careful balance of obligations on the two contending sides: for the Israelis, withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967; for the Arabs, acceptance of the right of all states to live within secure and recognized boundaries and that includes Israel. Despite the vagueness of the resolution, in its essence, it calls for basic advantages and disadvantages on both sides.

If there is to be a just peace in the Middle East, we believe the legitimate rights and concerns of the Palestinians have to be realized, including their right to play a full part in negotiations to determine their future and their right to a homeland within a clearly defined territory, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

We have differences with Israel over some of its policies and actions and we have been forthright in our criticism, both in public and in private. We strongly oppose such actions as the establishment of settlements in the occupied territories, the passage of the Jerusalem and Golan Heights laws and the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor and of the city of Beirut.

However, since foreign policy is publicly made in Canada, you would not want me, I am sure, to say anything here tonight which I would not equally say to a Canadian Jewish audience. Similarly, I am sure you would expect me to make it clear that Canada has always been and will remain committed to the existence and security of Israel. It is only by frankly acknowledging the claims of both sides that we can be fair.

There has been a lot said about the role which the Palestine Liberation Organization should play in a Middle East settlement. While we acknowledge that the PLO represents an important element of Palestinian opinion, we do not regard the PLO as the Palestinians' "sole legitimate representative". We have had contacts with the organization over time on a number of topics, particularly in Beirut.

In conclusion, may I urge Canadian Arabs to help to bring an objective attitude to the Arab-Israeli problem. We are not a culturally authoritarian people. We welcomed you to this country as Arabs and encouraged you, like Abraham Bounadere to retain your name and your culture. But I also know that, as Canadians, you want to share in the general values of Canadian society. And among the highest of those values is the search for world peace.

Lester Pearson helped to bring peace to the Middle East in 1956. Paul Martin helped to bring peace to Cyprus in 1964. You can help your government to bring peace to Middle East again in 1982. I entreat your dedication and your objectivity.