



# Statements and Speeches

---

No. 82/28

## CANADA'S POSITION ON THE MIDDLE EAST AFTER THE LEBANON CRISIS

Statement by Pierre De Bané, Minister of State (External Relations), to the Fourteenth Congress of the Centre Québécois de Relations Internationales, Quebec, September 30, 1982

I speak to you today at a moment of crisis in the Middle East — tragically only one of many which this region has suffered over the years. We are all appalled by the recent events in Lebanon for which there can be no excuse and which will do nothing to advance the interests of any group or country in the area. Having reached such a low point, *can we discern grounds for hope in the carnage of Beirut?* In my remarks I should like to review the prospects in the Middle East and describe the position and actions which Canada is taking to deal with the situation. In the most general and hesitant terms, I think there are some grounds for optimism if the main actors on the Middle East stage grasp the opportunities now open to them and press forward in the peace process. Let us hope that Lebanon in September 1982 will be seen not only as a reflection of antagonism and human degradation but also as the turning point in the Arab-Israeli dispute.

The Middle East situation has radically changed in recent months as a result of Israel's invasion of Lebanon — changed not only on the ground, but in the minds of many observers outside the area. There is no question that the horrors that have befallen the Lebanese and Palestinians in Lebanon have had a tremendous impact in Canada as they have in other countries. No one can remain untouched by the human suffering caused by the escalation of violence that has culminated in the assassination of Lebanon's president-elect and the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila camps — a senseless and wanton act whose inhumanity its perpetrators will never be able to explain away.

The consequences of the Lebanon crisis are wide-ranging. Israel has demonstrated its overwhelming military superiority in the region. The cost in human lives has been high for both Lebanese and Palestinians and the physical damage will scar the country and Beirut for a long time to come. The Palestine Liberation Organization has been severely beaten militarily but, although it has been dispersed throughout the Arab world, it could emerge more united and its leaders prepared to carry on a political struggle from their new locations. Very many Palestinians, at any rate in the Palestinian "diaspora", continue to look to it for leadership. The danger of further conflict between Israel and Syria remains. The Arab countries failed to rush to the support of the Syrians and PLO during the crisis and their position may have been weakened as a consequence. In the Israeli-occupied territories, there has been fresh turmoil and great uncertainty about the future, as Israeli settlements and Israel's

Lebanon crisis  
consequences

practical control are expanded further. Fortunately, there has been no super-power confrontation in or over Lebanon.

The Lebanon crisis has had a profound impact on the prospects for the peace process. In the past few weeks new and significant initiatives have been announced. Particularly striking was President Reagan's statement on September 1 signalling the United States' resolve to shift from mediator to more active participant in attempts to resolve the dispute. This is a welcome development; President Reagan's proposals merit the most careful consideration by all sides. Canada is in accord with the main lines of the US initiatives:

- the insistence on security for Israel and on full autonomy and self-government for the Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza in the Camp David framework;
- the participation of Jordan and the Palestinians in the autonomy talks. We have noted with particular interest the desire of King Hussein of Jordan to work out with the Palestinians a position on the region's future;
- the opposition to Israeli annexation of the territories.

**Palestinian  
state possible**

We have a somewhat different approach on some of the US proposals. While we would have no problem with self-governing Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza in association with Jordan, we would not rule out the possibility of a Palestinian state. For Canada the key is that we do not want to prejudge the outcome of eventual negotiations among the participants when they sit down to talk.

We will be following closely how the US translates its initiative into concrete action in the weeks and months to come. We will all want to give the Americans support as they attempt to translate their ideas in the short term into reality.

Hard on the heels of the Reagan statement came the resolution on the Arab-Israeli dispute by the Arab Summit in Fez. It is too early to have detailed views about the resolution but in a tentative way we see the Arab move in the following terms:

- we welcome reference in the plan to Security Council guarantees for peace. We would hope to have more details on this position, particularly the way in which all states in the region would be secure and have recognized frontiers;
- the Fez ideas will have to be judged on whether they can assist in moving the peace process forward. We note that there is little in them that deals with a mechanism of negotiations which we consider important;
- if the plan leads to negotiations for a balanced settlement in the Middle East which respects the principles of Resolution 242 then we think that a positive first step will have been taken.

**Canada's  
position**

In adopting the policies which we have followed on the Arab-Israeli dispute, we have aimed at maintaining a balanced and principled point of view which explains our ongoing support for Resolutions 242 and 338 and at keeping open our channels of communication with both sides. This includes ongoing contacts, not only with the various governments concerned, but also with the PLO. We have tried to understand and respect the genuine interests and concerns of both sides in the continuing conflict between the Arabs and Israelis and to take them seriously into account.

That does not mean that Canada has been neutral. We have taken strong positions on various issues. Canada, for instance, is firmly committed to Israel's existence, legitimacy, security and well-being as an independent state in the Middle East. We also deplore and condemn acts of terrorism against targets in Israel and elsewhere. Canada has taken a lead in trying to combat international terrorism. We have done so in the Economic Summits, in the development of international law on the subject and in attempting to obtain wider adherence to international conventions to make them more effective. These are basic elements of our Middle East policy. They are well understood and, I think, respected by all, including even the most directly-engaged Arab parties. We lose no opportunity to re-emphasize them in speaking to Arab governments and Palestinian leaders. In the interests of regional and world peace – and in their own interest – the Arabs should agree to sit down and negotiate with Israel as Sadat did in 1977. There is no other route to a long-term settlement.

What has not always been appreciated is that firm Canadian support for the existence of the State of Israel does not preclude fundamental differences with the Israeli government over certain of its policies.

In particular, Canada has been critical of Israel's policy towards the occupied territories of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. We have told Israel that we cannot accept the position that it has gained the right to retain permanent control over these territories. The repeated assertion by Israeli spokesmen that Israel will never withdraw from them, coupled with the announced determination to increase the number of settlements and the rejection of any suggestion about their removal in any peace arrangement, undermines confidence about the possibility of successful negotiations and is, therefore, very unhelpful to the peace process.

Canada has criticized the strong measures taken in the occupied territories to suppress the developing Palestinian national feeling, including Israel's closing of Palestinian universities, its tough measures to put down demonstrations (which have led to serious casualties) and its undermining of the local Palestinian leadership through the expulsion of some mayors and the dismissal of other mayors and municipal councils.

Canada has strongly opposed Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem in 1980 and its move to annex the Golan Heights in 1981.

---

**Contributions  
by Canada**

We have made clear that we consider the invasion of Lebanon and the subsequent Israeli incursion into West Beirut unjustified and a grave setback to the peace process. In the words of the Prime Minister, we think it is "important to avoid actions which fuel rather than dampen the flames of violence and hatred in the Middle East". Just as the PLO's policy of armed struggle against Israel did nothing to advance the Palestinian cause, so we doubt whether Israel's prolonged use of military force in Lebanon will really add to the long-term security of Israel.

We have not been neutral regarding the fate of the Palestinians — either in its humanitarian or political dimension. Canadian support for the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians is a matter of record. Over the years, we have contributed \$70 million (US) to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Of the \$2.55 million we have contributed to humanitarian assistance for Lebanon since the invasion began in June, almost a million has gone specifically to UNRWA.

What is less known, perhaps, is the contribution we have been making through non-governmental organizations, particularly to the development of medical and educational programs for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

On the political front, we have supported the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Palestinians. We support their right to play a full part in negotiations to determine their future. Moreover, we support the Palestinians' need for political self-expression within a territorial framework. We support their right to a homeland within a clearly-defined territory, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. We have never subscribed to the view that the Palestinians already have a homeland of their own, namely, Jordan.

Events in Lebanon have greatly heightened the interest of the international community in the Palestinian problem, which, with the continued security of Israel, is the central issue of the Arab-Israeli dispute. There has been growing concern about the situation of the Palestinians and their tragedy, given their developing national consciousness and their identity as a people. This has been most clearly reflected at the United Nations.

A good part of the Arab-Israeli conflict is fought in the United Nations and other international bodies with the Arabs taking the offensive and the Israelis being very much on the defensive. The Arab countries have stepped up their political campaign against Israel over the past year in virtually every international forum — over 40 separate resolutions in the General Assembly alone. These efforts were intensified this year during several emergency special sessions and may be pursued this fall at the regular General Assembly. Sometimes we can, on balance, support specific texts that they propose; but on other occasions we have been obliged to oppose or abstain on their resolutions, particularly when the texts contain elements which would seriously prejudice eventual negotiations for a peace settlement.

---

The Arabs have now reached the stage of questioning Israel's *bona fides* as a peace-loving member of the UN, thereby laying the groundwork to expel or suspend Israel or to deny Israel its rights of membership in the United Nations family of organizations. While we understand the deep resentments which have sparked these resolutions, Canada believes firmly in the principle of the universality of UN membership and cannot give any support to moves which run counter to this principle.

**All foreign  
forces should  
leave Lebanon**

As to Israel's long-term intentions we consider that Israeli and all other foreign forces should withdraw from Lebanon unconditionally and without delay. Until the Lebanon situation settles down, the prospects for negotiations on the Palestinian question remain minimal. The various peace initiatives demonstrate an encouraging new impetus in grappling with the Palestinian problem. We must hope that all sides will be prepared to compromise, although in the present climate of distrust created by the latest tragedies in West Beirut, compromise may be more difficult than it has ever been. But the attempt must be made. In particular, we hope Israel will find it possible to take a much less uncompromising position on the future of the occupied territories, as well as in its dealings with the inhabitants of those territories, so that there will be some incentive for them to join the peace process.

For their part, Arab governments and Palestinian leaders should understand the basis for Israel's fears about its long-term security, despite its present military predominance. They must make it unmistakably clear that, as part of a just settlement assuring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, they would agree to genuine and lasting peace with Israel. As Canadians, we should do our best to persuade the parties to move in the direction of real mutual accommodation and to make much greater efforts to understand the fears and preoccupations of the other side. Only on expanded mutual understanding can peace eventually be built.