



news release

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CANADA TO HOST SYMPOSIUM FOR SENIOR OFFICERS OF MIDDLE EASTERN NAVAL FORCES

Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet today announced that Canada will host a Symposium on Maritime Confidence-Building Measures for Commanders and other senior officers of Middle Eastern naval forces. The Symposium, which will be held from August 29 to September 1, 1994, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is taking place in the context of the Middle East Peace Process.

"Canada is particularly pleased to host this Symposium which will bring together, for the first time, high-ranking Israeli and Arab naval officers. Canada is strongly committed to taking concrete steps to advance the Middle East Peace Process. This Symposium represents a rare opportunity for senior officers from the region to exchange views face-to-face," said Mr. Ouellet.

The Halifax Symposium is intended to allow Middle Eastern naval officers to follow up on progress to date on such issues as multilateral co-operation in Search and Rescue operations, Prevention of Incidents at Sea, and regional maritime security and co-operation. Representatives of the United States and Russia, as co-sponsors of the Peace Process, will also attend. The Canadian Coast Guard will provide a demonstration of Canadian Search and Rescue techniques.

The Halifax Symposium, which will be hosted by Rear-Admiral Gary Garnett, Commander of the Canadian Navy's Atlantic fleet, is being organized by Dalhousie University's Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, on behalf of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Attached is a backgrounder which provides more details on Canada's contribution to Maritime Confidence-Building Measures in the Middle East.

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Backgrounder

CANADA'S CONTRIBUTION TO MARITIME CONFIDENCE-BUILDING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Launched in Madrid in October 1991 with the United States and the former Soviet Union as co-sponsors, the Middle East Peace Process is a major international effort aimed at resolving the long-standing Arab-Israeli conflict. It is a two-track process consisting of direct bilateral negotiations between Israel and its neighbours — Jordan, Syria and Lebanon — and the Palestinians, and of multilateral negotiations involving more than 40 regional and non-regional countries sitting in five working groups.

Canada is an active participant in the multilateral phase of the Peace Process which was launched in Moscow in January 1992. In addition to chairing the Refugee Working Group, Canada participates in the other four working groups — Arms Control and Regional Security, Economic Development, Water Resources, and the Environment — and is also a member of the Multilateral Steering Group which reviews the work of all five groups and plans future meetings.

The purpose of these talks is to complement the bilateral negotiations by focusing on issues of regional concern and taking concerted action in addressing them.

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES: CANADIAN CONTRIBUTION

Recognizing Canada's consistent contribution to regional peacekeeping, active participation in the Arms Control and Regional Security Group, and naval and coast guard expertise, the Group asked Canada to lead its examination of the applicability of Maritime Confidence-Building Measures (MCBMs) in the Middle East.

MCBMs were seen as a potentially productive topic because, of all the spheres of military rivalry in the Middle East, the maritime arena is generally regarded as the least contentious. Because there are relatively few Middle East disputes of a purely naval character, it was reasoned that it might be easier for concrete steps to be taken in the maritime sphere at the beginning of the process.

After consultations, Canada proposed that initial considerations should centre on two specific measures: enhanced regional co-operation in maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) and the elaboration of the basic framework of a regional Prevention of Incidents at Sea (INCSEA) Agreement.

Following acceptance of these proposals, Canada organized a workshop at the Canadian Coast Guard College in Sydney, Nova

Scotia, in September 1993. The workshop emphasized practical, hands-on examination of both SAR and INCSEA concepts. Though all participants have Search and Rescue capabilities, co-operation in this field is not yet a common feature in the region. The concept of Prevention of Incidents at Sea is entirely new to the region.

At the end of the Sydney Workshop, which included Israeli and Arab participants, all agreed that a good beginning would be for regional states to exchange information on their SAR communications frequencies and their command and control provisions for SAR. On the issue of the prevention of incidents at sea, the workshop demonstrated that early communication of intentions between ships is the best means of avoiding misunderstandings and that the ready availability of a group of specially tailored signals can help prevent a benign misunderstanding from becoming a potential source of conflict. The participants agreed on the importance of timely and thorough consultations and on the need for a specific code of procedures for encounters at sea. In that regard, they asked Canada to prepare a draft text for a multilateral INCSEA Agreement in the Middle East.

Discussion on both issues resumed at a workshop last March in Antalya, Turkey. The talks focused on the desirability and mechanics of enhanced regional co-operation in the area of Search and Rescue and on Canada's draft INCSEA text which was accepted as a basic framework for the discussions.

As a way of supporting these discussions, Canada was asked to prepare two events this summer for officers of Middle Eastern navies. The first was a practical demonstration of both Search and Rescue and Prevention of Incidents at Sea concepts. The demonstration, involving Canadian and American warships — HMCS *Halifax* and USS *Santa Barbara* — currently stationed in the Mediterranean, took place near Venice off the coast of Italy on July 15. Aviation units of the Italian navy also participated. The demonstration allowed Middle Eastern naval officers to acquire first-hand experience of the implementation of the Maritime Confidence-Building Measures under discussion.

The second event is the symposium for the commanders and other high-ranking officers of the Middle Eastern navies to be held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, August 29 to September 1. The Symposium will focus on such issues as multilateral co-operation in Search and Rescue operations, Prevention of Incidents at Sea, and regional maritime security and co-operation.

Canada believes that, given the history of conflict in the Middle East, it is quite significant that Israeli and Arab naval officers are prepared to undertake an in-depth examination of Maritime Confidence-Building Measures.

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