



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 66/19

PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs,
the Honourable Paul Martin, at the "Sam Lax Negev Dinner",
at the Addis Israel Synagogue, in Hamilton, May 15, 1966.

...Peace in the Middle East, for Israel and for all countries in the region, has been one of the major objectives of the United Nations. Canada has, as you know, taken a prominent part in the work of the United Nations in this area. The nature of our contribution has been stated on many occasions. I refer to it again because of your continuing interest in the conditions which provide the ultimate guarantee that your effort and the effort of the people of Israel will bear fruit in tranquillity.

Canada provides the largest number of observers to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization and has, in the past years, maintained close to 900 soldiers and officers with the United Nations Emergency Force stationed in the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. The long duration of these peace-keeping operations has obviously led to a significant commitment of Canadian funds and manpower and has involved us in a self-denying role. Canada considers itself precluded, by reason of the impartiality called for by its UN role, from becoming a provider of significant arms or military equipment to the countries of the area. I am sure that you would understand how any action we might take towards supplying arms in that area could immediately prejudice our ability to work effectively towards peace and stability there.

This arduous and self-denying role Canada has, nonetheless, been willing to play since we have thereby made, we think, a substantial contribution to the containment of a dangerous situation and the prevention of escalation. We are prepared to continue to help in peace keeping as long as it is deemed essential for the maintenance of stability and the deterrence of conflict. Canada believes that by assisting in the maintenance of stability, both in the areas I have indicated and in the nearby island of Cyprus, it is making a major contribution to the creation of conditions which enable the countries of the area to pursue their own development. They will also contribute indirectly to the betterment of less-endowed areas. Amongst other examples, I am thinking here of Israel's assistance to certain African countries.

Canada has I think developed a sympathetic approach to and interest in Middle Eastern problems because of its experience there in recent years and its 18 years of service as a participant in Middle East peace-keeping operations.

You can understand, therefore, why I should feel the regret which I know you share that the basic difficulties of the Middle East have not been resolved. They still show little sign of being resolved. I am particularly aware of the tragic fact that conditions have not improved to an extent which would enable a greater proportion of the resources of the area to be applied to peaceful pursuits, more especially economic development. I am thinking, for example, as you are, of the pressing problems of placing people in economically secure activities in newly-reclaimed land.

I do not, of course, expect suspicion and hostility of such long standing as exist in the Middle East to be wiped out at one stroke. The countries of the area owe it to themselves, if not to the rest of the world to which the Middle East has given so much in the past, to reach over a period of time a mutual understanding, tacit if need be, that solutions lie not in the recourse to force or in the use of threats. They lie rather in the deliberate avoidance of words or actions incompatible with UN Charter obligations and with peaceful intentions and stability; in the willingness, when necessary, to have recourse to the international machinery established to maintain peace.

Although the reasons for particular situations are well known, we would all agree, I think, that it is regrettable that many countries at critical stages in their economic development should continue to find it necessary for their national security to devote large amounts to what is, in fact, the maintenance of a military deterrent. We all have reason to be concerned that the continuing extensive purchase of arms and the references which are often made to nuclear-weapons development could create an arms race leading towards a highly dangerous situation involving nuclear arms. Our own efforts in the field of disarmament testify to our worry at the upset in the international balance which would result from the increase in the number of states possessing independent nuclear capabilities.

We have been happy, therefore, to note the commitment expressed by Israel that it would not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle East and the support which states of the area have given to proposals for the creation of Middle East and African nuclear-free zones. In the present Middle East climate of continuing mutual suspicion, a regional agreement on the non-acquisition of nuclear weapons accompanied with guarantees for the security of such non-nuclear states strikes me as the one step to which all interested nations should give their encouragement. Whether it is achieved in a regional or wider context is irrelevant, as long as pledges are acknowledged which could initiate an improvement in the whole climate of the area.

We have been considering creative ability, acts of faith and the tiring labour required to transform a desert and advance human welfare. I can assure you that in United Nations initiatives for peace and, I hope, in the foreign policy of our own country, there are parallels in terms of sustained diplomatic effort to the work of economic development with which you are particularly concerned tonight. I am pleased that the Foreign Minister of Israel, whom I had the pleasure of seeing in Ottawa a few months ago, paid tribute, in a recent speech in the Knesset, to the way in which Canada had "helped to fortify stability and tranquillity in the Mid-East". It has been our aim, in spite of the great problems involved and the disappointingly slow way in which any progress towards international stability is achieved, to pursue any possibility of fortifying peace in that area.

Canada's participation in United Nations peace keeping requires an attempt to develop relations with individual nations in the area on a basis of justice and goodwill. We make every effort to do just this. Our links with the Middle East have become many and varied. Our trade with the area is far from negligible, considering that we had almost no contact with the region a relatively short time ago. We want to continue to develop friendly and co-operative relations with all the countries of the Middle East.

I believe that sustained effort in a good cause can bear results even under very difficult circumstances. That is why we persist in our diplomacy and in the peace keeping which is now an important instrument of diplomacy, in the effort to secure international stability. That is why I congratulate you on your sustained effort to make the earth in the Negev bear fruit, so that its inhabitants may live in prosperity, dignity and peace.

S/C