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STRENGTHENING CANADA'S TIES WITH SAUDI ARABIA

Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade Michael H. Wilson, following two days of meetings with Government and business leaders in Riyadh and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, expressed satisfaction at his warm reception and obvious signals of strengthened ties between the two countries. Mr. Wilson is leading a 40-member trade mission to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, concluding on May 8.

On the first full day of meetings in Riyadh, May 4, the Minister met with the Ministers of Defence, Finance, Commerce, Industry and Electricity, as well as with the Minister of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones. The Canadian business delegation meanwhile held meetings with their Saudi counterparts and banking and industry authorities for briefings on the Saudi economy and business opportunities. A luncheon hosted by the Saudi Minister of Commerce, Dr. Soliman Al-Solaim, was attended by four senior Cabinet Ministers and scores of Saudi business leaders.

In Jeddah, the commercial centre of Saudi Arabia, Mr. Wilson and the business delegation yesterday met with the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce for a full round of commercial discussions.

"Throughout these meetings, the Saudis have openly indicated their desire to do more business with Canada," Mr. Wilson said. "Canada and Saudi Arabia were allies in the coalition that enforced the UN Resolutions during the Gulf war, demonstrating Canada's commitment to the region. The work that Bell Canada International did in establishing the Saudi system of telecommunications in the 1980s clearly established Canada as a dependable source of high technology. As well, there are 12 Canadian companies

established here and more than 3,000 Canadian residents. This trade mission is helping to deepen and broaden Canadian-Saudi relations and should contribute to the realization of several billions of dollars in new business currently in the works."

The Minister was pleased to confirm the resumption of two important events that had been postponed due to the Gulf war:

First, a major 10,000-m² exhibit entitled "Saudi Arabia: Yesterday and Today" will tour Canada this summer, following a number of showings in European, Middle Eastern and American cities. The exhibit, which depicts Saudi Arabia's people, history, culture and dramatic economic progress, will be shown in Montreal, July 12 to 28, and in Toronto, August 14 to September 2.

Second, the Saudi Government has agreed that the sixth meeting of the Canada-Saudi Arabia Joint Economic Commission (JEC) will be held in Ottawa in late September.

"The JEC brings together Government and business leaders from both countries. It is a major event, at which we will mark the economic milestones in relations between the two countries, reinforce business ties, and plan the further development of our partnership," Mr. Wilson said, adding that two-way trade is now in excess of \$1 billion annually.

He noted that a bilateral agreement signed with Saudi Arabia in 1983 granting both countries Most Favoured Nation status with respect to tariffs has improved Canadian access to the Saudi market. Also, a bilateral air agreement signed when former Minister of Defence Bill McKnight visited Saudi Arabia in November paves the way for discussions regarding direct flights between the two countries.

Mr. Wilson and his delegation are travelling to Kuwait City today, and then on to Abu Dhabi, May 7, and Dubai, May 8.

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