

Minister for
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Trade



Ministre du
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MINISTER WILSON LEADS CANADIAN DELEGATION INTO KUWAIT

Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade Michael H. Wilson yesterday led a group of 40 Canadian business executives into Kuwait City for meetings on how Canada can participate further in the post-war reconstruction of Kuwait. The group flew to Kuwait from Saudi Arabia in a Canadian Forces Hercules that had just completed a scheduled series of relief flights, dropping supplies to Kurdish refugees along the Turkish-Iraqi border.

The Minister was received by the Emir of Kuwait, His Highness Sheik Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah, and later met with the Ministers of Petroleum, Commerce and Industry, Public Works, and Communications. He then rejoined the Canadian business delegation, which had met with the president of the largest trading organization in the country and with officers of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is supervising much of the emergency phase of reconstruction. At a reception at the Canadian Embassy, local business and government leaders met with the Canadian delegation to discuss business opportunities.

"Having seen, first-hand, the damage done to this country, and after being briefed by Kuwaiti Ministers on their reconstruction needs, I am fully convinced of the strong role that Canada can and will play in rebuilding, repairing and refurbishing this country," Mr. Wilson said. "Their requirements and our assets, particularly in the fields of energy, engineering, construction, telecommunications, and transportation, form an excellent match.

"Importantly, we have learned on this mission that Canada should place more emphasis on providing Kuwait with goods and equipment. Their shelves must be restocked and their factories revived. Virtually all the commercial vehicles are gone."

Damage assessments heard by the Canadian group put the cost of Kuwait reconstruction at considerably lower than half the

\$100 billion earlier estimated, although the amount is still significant. The basic infrastructure was not as badly damaged as had been thought, and electricity, water and roads have generally been brought back into working order. However, according to local authorities, the private sector has been devastated, and Kuwaitis are seeking dependable suppliers who will maintain a presence in the country.

Now that emergency services have largely been restored, decisions as to how the country will proceed with the second phase of the restoration effort probably will be made in several weeks as the new Kuwaiti Cabinet becomes established and financial services are re-established.

Local authorities encouraged the Canadian delegation to make proposals and follow up through agents in the country.

"This mission comes at a pivotal time, as the Kuwaitis begin the job of assessing potential suppliers," Mr. Wilson said, adding that the visit provides valuable reinforcement to the mission in March led by former Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Right Honourable Joe Clark -- the first Ministerial mission by any country into Kuwait following the war.

"The Kuwaiti government and private sector are genuinely appreciative of the role that Canada played in Kuwait's liberation from Iraq; they are aware of our economic strengths and expertise; and they have proof of our commitment to maintaining a sustained business relationship," Mr. Wilson said. "These factors will serve Canada well as contracts are issued for the major part of the reconstruction effort."

Following their meetings in Kuwait City, the Minister and his delegation travelled to a nearby oil field to watch as firefighters from Calgary-based Safety Boss Ltd. worked to bring under control one of the approximately 600 damaged Kuwait oil wells.

"Safety Boss is one of six Canadian firms that are currently participating in the emergency phase of Kuwaiti reconstruction. They are demonstrating the fact that Canadian firms have some of the best technology and skills in the world. The Government of Canada intends to ensure that our strengths are employed to maximum advantage here in Kuwait and throughout the Middle East," said Mr. Wilson.

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