

Statement

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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE ANDRÉ OUELLET,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
TO THE BEIRUT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

**BEIRUT, Lebanon
January 27, 1995**



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Mr. President of the Chamber of Commerce, members, guests and colleagues:

Thank you for your warm welcome. I am very pleased to be here today in the company of one of the largest Canadian trade delegations ever to visit Lebanon. I have only been here for two days, but already I am impressed with the incredible reconstruction effort going on in this city. The speed and scale of this effort tell me that the business people sitting around this table have not been idle, and we Canadians have our work cut out for us if we hope to catch up to our competitors!

What I have seen in Beirut gives me hope for the future of Lebanon. It is a tremendous credit to the perseverance and creativity of the Lebanese people. I am committed to developing close, solid ties between our two countries.

Yesterday I took an important initial step toward fulfilling this objective by reopening our embassy. Our new premises will soon be operational. Our Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien, and I have appointed Mr. Daniel Marchand as the next Ambassador to Lebanon. Business people can count on Mr. Marchand's experience and expertise. A trade commissioner by profession, Mr. Marchand was until quite recently Director of the Africa and Middle East Trade Development Division at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in Ottawa. I have instructed Mr. Marchand specifically to develop and strengthen our trade and economic ties with Lebanon. This is an objective that all of us here share. In order to succeed, we must count on the active participation and direct involvement of the Canadian private sector and, needless to say, of the Lebanese private sector. With what I have seen while here, I don't think I have anything to worry about! On the contrary, I hope that our new embassy will have the capacity to handle the load!

Our government recognizes the importance of the private sector in developing and strengthening ties between countries. This is why I wanted to be accompanied by some of the most dynamic of Canadian companies. Without a doubt, these past weeks have enabled companies in our two countries to create, and in some cases to strengthen, partnerships that will be both long-lasting and profitable.

The confidence that I am expressing is based on recent developments, which I know will be of special interest to you. The Export Development Corporation [EDC], Canada's official export assistance agency, has announced that it is prepared to finance projects, on a case-by-case basis, in Lebanon. The financial and insurance services provided by the EDC, coupled with the selective and complementary support of the Canadian International Development Agency [CIDA] will help Canadian companies to be more active in Lebanon.

The sharing of knowledge and expertise also promotes the development of strong ties between countries. I am pleased to announce that CIDA will make more than \$5.5 million in development assistance funds available to Lebanon. Thanks in part to this new infusion of funds, our two governments will be working together on a project to support the reform of the Lebanese public sector. I have also increased the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives, which is designed to help NGOs [non-governmental organizations] take up the challenges of reconstruction and development. Finally, in my meeting yesterday with Prime Minister Hariri, I confirmed that Canada would be contributing \$4.8 million to the Lebanese Finance Ministry for its tax-system reform project.

The confidence that I feel is based on another remarkable fact: trade between our two countries continued to prosper even during the civil war. Canadian exports to Lebanon are flourishing, rising from less than \$8 million in 1990 to over \$44 million.

Allow me to say that, as a Canadian and a Quebecker, this visit is a real honour for me. Quebec is now home to most of our citizens of Lebanese origin. And Quebec accounts for 63 per cent of all Canadian exports to Lebanon as well as the bulk of our imports from Lebanon. With Lebanese exports to Canada in the order of \$4.5 million annually, this year's prospects are encouraging.

Of course, we know full well that trade is a two-way street and has to flourish in both directions. For this reason Canada and Lebanon recently negotiated and signed an agreement granting increased quotas for Lebanese textiles and clothing exports to Canada. I congratulate the Chamber of Commerce for its efforts on this file and the Director General of the Industrialists Association, Mr. Nabil Ladki, who participated in the negotiation of this agreement with Mrs. Aeltounian of the Chamber of Commerce. It is true what they say about the Lebanese: they are tough negotiators and they are persistent - qualities that we Canadians share and admire! In fact I can see no limit to the tremendous level of interest among the Canadian business sector in participating in the reconstruction of Lebanon.

This is Canada's sixth trade delegation to Lebanon since the election of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's government in 1993. Firms from across Canada have participated in the "Rebuild Lebanon" exposition. Both the federal and Quebec governments as well as the Canada-Arab Business Council have organized major trade missions to Lebanon. Participants in those events came from sectors of particular excellence in Canadian industry: health, construction and telecommunications, to name a few.

We can already see the fruits of their efforts. Earlier today I witnessed the signing of a \$23-million contract in Tripoli

between AFCAN, a Canadian company in the medical sector, and The Tripoli Hospital. This is but the beginning.

Canadian business people are interested in Lebanon because they speak the same language – the language of free and open markets. Lebanon remains perhaps the most open economy in the region, and offers a business environment in which our companies are most comfortable. In fact, I believe Lebanon will soon regain a prominent place as a regional centre for finance, trade and tourism.

Canada-Lebanon relations are indeed special, and they go beyond trade, important though it may be. Indeed, the human factor is the most profound element in our relations. With a quarter of a million Lebanese-Canadians, it is difficult to find anyone in Lebanon who does not have relatives or friends in Canada.

Senator Pierre De Bané and Mac Harb, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for International Trade, both present today, are Canadians of Lebanese descent and great contributors to Canadian society: they represent the qualities that the Lebanese-Canadian community brings to our national life. Senator Marcel Prud'homme, although not of Lebanese descent, has contributed greatly to the promotion of Canada's relations with the Arab world.

Canada is also a political friend of Lebanon's. Canada stands by its friends, and we will support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon as reflected in United Nations Security Council Resolution 425.

In the context of this resolution and the Ta'if Accord of 1989, Canada supports the progressive extension of the Lebanese government's authority over all of its territory, and the withdrawal of foreign troops from Lebanon.

We believe that the best way of ensuring the security of all the people of Lebanon, from north to south, and of the region as well, lies in a strong Lebanese government capable of exercising its authority throughout the country.

In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to the members of the Chamber of Commerce who assisted Canadian firms in recent years when our programs and services were not what they are today. Thank you for your support in these difficult times.

We need a stable, independent and prosperous Lebanon. That is why I am here today, and why I expect to be back soon.

Thank you.