



Statements and Speeches

No. 82/8

CANADA'S CONCERN FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Address by the Honourable Mark MacGuigan, Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Canada-Israel Committee, Ottawa, March 31, 1982

Down through history, the Jewish people have had their right to live, to be one people challenged repeatedly. They have met threats to their very existence in the form of a monumental obscenity against mankind, the holocaust. Many in Canada and many now living in Israel know that horror from personal experience. But most Jews have been touched by it in some way, either directly or as a result of the loss of family or friends. Whether they have undergone that trauma themselves or grown up with that dark cloud of history as a background darkening their lives, all Jews see Israel as a land of their dreams. Those who have taken up new lives in Israel have made this homeland a green and pleasant land. Those who remain in the Diaspora (I am sure I can say without exception) look to Israel for spiritual leadership and for inspiration. And, in turn, they try to make their contribution to the new Israel that is taking shape.

Those of us who regard ourselves, and I hope are regarded, as friends of Israel are aware of the deep desire of Israelis, finally to live peacefully and to be able to carry on the religion, philosophy and culture that has brought them through centuries of adversity. As friends, our aim has to be to make some contribution to that peaceful goal in what we say and in what we do.

We cannot forget the sacrifices Israel has made and is making in the search for peace. In just 25 more days it will be giving witness to the true extent of its commitment to peace when it withdraws from the Sinai peninsula. There have been many obstacles for the Israeli government to overcome in reaching this stage, and in the days that remain before the withdrawal is concluded, there will probably be more.

The original decision to return the Sinai to Egypt was a momentous one for Israel. It was courageous as well, because it involved giving up strategically and economically important advantages that it had enjoyed for a number of years.

I appreciate Israel's concerns about what the future holds in store after April 25. There has been great disruption in the lives of those who had built new homes for themselves and their families in the Sinai Desert, never imagining that peace between Israel and an Arab neighbour would be possible in their lifetime. The extent of the trauma that peace with an Arab neighbour could create within Jewish society is only now being fully understood, as Jew must confront Jew, to ensure that the terms of the peace treaty are respected.

The withdrawal from the Sinai is just one stage in the peace process, of course. There are continuing efforts under the Camp David accords which Israel has committed itself to making, together with Egypt, to reach agreement on West Bank autonomy for the transitional period before the permanent status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is settled. There is also the process of normalization of relations to which both Israel and Egypt are committed. We believe it is in everyone's interest that these aspects of the Camp David peace process be strongly supported, and we have given them our support from the very beginning. Efforts in both these fields must succeed, so that eventually the Palestinian problem, which the parties to the Camp David accords are trying to grapple with, can be resolved and so eliminated as a source of conflict between Arabs and Israelis.

**Problem of
establishment
of settlements**

However, we have frankly to say that Israel has recently created problems for itself and for its friends. At the heart of these problems are the measures it has taken in its search for security and national fulfilment. These include the continued establishment of settlements in the occupied territories and the passage of the Jerusalem and Golan Heights laws — actions which are perceived as laying permanent claim to territory acquired by force.

We and most other countries have strongly opposed these measures, which we view as contrary to international law and which make the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the area — and support from Israel's friends — all the more difficult.

Of course, we continue to support Israel on other questions, or even on other aspects of these questions. At the Emergency Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the Golan Heights when Israel's standing in the United Nations was questioned, we regarded this move as running counter to the principle of universality, and we therefore voted against it, even though we strongly opposed the Israeli government's own action.

I cannot see the efforts against Israel diminishing in the near future unless somehow the cycle of action and reaction can be broken.

Events such as those occurring now in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which we cannot but deplore, provide a classic example of the kind of escalation I am talking about, and contribute to international deterioration of Israel's position. As I pointed out in a statement on March 25, "If not checked, such violence could not only create further obstacles to the success of the autonomy negotiations but could also have far-reaching consequences for stability and peace in the region." In the end, such policies of relying on force rather than political persuasion in reaching a solution to the conflict do not serve the interests of peace.

For this reason, I called on all those involved in the latest events to exercise restraint and avoid provocation and violence.

Basis for
settlement

In my view, and I said this in my statement, the situation once again points to the need for a negotiated resolution of the dispute. The basis for such negotiations must be Security Council Resolution 242 with its careful balance of obligations on the two contending sides: for the Israelis withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967; for the Arabs, acceptance of the right of all states, including Israel, to live within secure and recognized boundaries. We believe there has to be explicit Arab recognition of Israel's permanence and legitimacy, if there is ever going to be any progress in achieving a settlement. But we believe, too, that the legitimate rights and concerns of the Palestinians have to be realized, including their right to play a full part in negotiations to determine their future and their right to a homeland within a clearly defined territory, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

For the moment, attention is focused on the more limited negotiations for a transitional period of autonomy for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The best guide here is the Camp David Accord: "The solution from the negotiations must also recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their just requirements. In this way, the Palestinians will participate in the determination of their own future..." I think the difficulties being experienced in these negotiations come down to the fact that both sides are making efforts to stake out their final positions on the ultimate status of the occupied territories.

Israel has taken a number of unilateral measures, that have a direct bearing on this question which has, in the end, to be negotiated if there is to be a just and lasting peace.

Israel's Arab antagonists have been trying, in their own way, in some cases through unacceptable terrorist actions, through a refusal to negotiate with Israel, and through one-sided and polemical UN resolutions that have become increasingly strident and uncompromising, to gain international acceptance of certain principles, thereby laying the groundwork for the kind of ultimate settlement they would like to see. In the process they have taken advantage of Israel's unilateral actions regarding the occupied territories and have managed to isolate Israel, in some cases even from its friends, despite the many objectionable features of the resolutions presented. We have expressed our strong concern about the tendency, which we find disturbing, of escalating from one year to the next, the polemical and extreme demands in the various resolutions relating to Israel, and we try to moderate the debate and keep the door to a settlement open.

While I have to admit to some concerns about the prospects for the peace process, I am not entirely pessimistic. There have, after all, been some important positive developments. Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai, in particular, is of fundamental significance because it provides graphic proof of the possibility that Israel and its neighbours can reach agreement if the will is there on both sides. It is up to us to build on that accomplishment.

Canada's role

I think the most important contribution Canada can make in the search for a way out of this continuing conflict is to maintain our channels of communication with both sides. I was glad to see that in the brief which the Canada-Israel Committee (CIC) representatives left with me last November this kind of role was endorsed. In maintaining a balanced and principled point of view, we have to understand and respect the genuine interests and concerns of both sides in this conflict and to take them seriously into account.

I have had various occasions to talk with representatives of Israel and the Arab countries in my efforts to understand their point of view and to impress on them Canadian views.

Canada is well-placed to pursue these exchanges in efforts to build a peaceful world in which Israel and its Arab neighbours can live together in security. I am happy to say that in our contacts with Israel we have been able to speak openly and frankly together. Our bilateral relations have always been close and intimate. Much of the contact between our two countries, of course, takes place automatically and naturally at the private level, but our governments reap the benefits of the good rapport created in this way.

We have built on these private contacts and, over the years, have developed an extensive and perhaps unexpected framework of agreements and understandings to give further encouragement to co-operation in a wide variety of fields — trade, agriculture, industrial research, health, cultural relations and film-making. Our co-operation has even extended to tripartite co-operation as a means of bringing Israeli and Canadian experience to the service of mankind in developing countries.

Ministerial visits have been helpful in extending and deepening our relations with Israel in the past. The possibilities for such visits were more limited during the election periods in Canada and Israel, but a few did take place and the pace has picked up again.

It has been my wish for some time to experience, even if briefly, the unique atmosphere of Israel, which I know only at second-hand, so that I would be better placed in my discussion of Middle East issues. I hope I will have an opportunity to take up a long standing invitation to visit Israel in the not too distant future. There are a lot of things to discuss at this state in Canada-Israeli relations and in Israel's relations with the other countries of the Middle East and the world.

CIC's contribution

I think the CIC has made a vital contribution to this process of understanding. During my periodic talks with your representatives, the spotlight, of course, is usually on the Canadian government's perceptions of the problems of the Middle East and its policies on these issues. I dare say, however, that the CIC also has a keen interest in the perceptions and policies of the Israeli government, particularly as they impinge

on our bilateral relations, and that the CIC's view of things also finds its way to the Israeli government through the many contacts it has with Israelis.

I commend your actions to make Canadian policy better known and understood in Israel to ensure a flow of information and views in both directions. This kind of dialogue, or should I say "trialogue", is in the best tradition of the openness, frankness and cordiality which has marked the Canada-Israel relationship over the years.

It is of vital importance to us that our position on the Middle East peace process be clearly understood. In the welter of issues and events, one thing has always remained constant, and it is a fundamental point: Canada's strong commitment to Israel's existence, legitimacy, security and well-being. This is a basic element of our Middle East policy and I expect it to remain so.

S/C