

Statement

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Déclaration

Secrétaire d'État
aux Affaires
extérieures

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AS DELIVERED

A STATEMENT FOR CANADA
BY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA McDOUGALL,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
AT THE MIDDLE EAST MULTILATERAL CONFERENCE

MOSCOW, Russia
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Affaires extérieures et
Commerce extérieur Canada

External Affairs and
International Trade Canada

Canada

Mr Chairmen, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that Canada joins today in this historic inauguration of multilateral Middle East negotiations. These will address the regional issues which must be dealt with in order to build stability in the Middle East.

Our thanks and congratulations go to our host, Russia, which has provided such a warm and friendly welcome and has made a success of the remarkable task of organizing this conference so soon after its independence as a separate country.

We are committed to making a constructive contribution to the resolution of a situation that has troubled the world for decades. The approach being encouraged is fully consistent with Canada's concept of "co-operative security," that is, that true peace and security depend on comprehensive dialogue and co-operation among all concerned.

Although Canada is far from the Middle East, there are links of history, commerce, culture, family contacts and religion that have created among Canadians an abiding concern for, and involvement in, the region.

Indeed, since the Second World War, there has been an active engagement by my country in helping to resolve the problems of the region. Canada has worked continuously, both within the United Nations and in other fora, to help establish more favourable conditions for peace in the Middle East and for justice for all the peoples of the region.

Canada's support for the well-being and security of Israel has always been in the forefront of our policy respecting the Middle East. We welcome the new sense of worldwide recognition of Israel that has developed over recent years. Canada supports as well the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination, in the context of peace negotiations.

In our view, the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 remain the fundamental pillars on which agreement must be built.

Canada has contributed to every UN peacekeeping force in the Middle East. I, myself, have visited our peacekeeping forces in the region and bear witness to their dedication.

Canadian forces are still present on the Golan, in Kuwait, and in the Sinai, in addition to Canadian military observers who continue their role as members of the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in several countries of the region.

Peace and justice require more than security, however. Canada has long believed that economic development is a fundamental requirement for true stability in the Middle East.

Thus, Canada has, over the years, been deeply involved in economic development programs in the countries of the region. We intend to continue this commitment, as well as our tradition of generous humanitarian assistance to the victims of both natural and man-made disasters.

Canada commends those who have been active in the decisions that have moved the process to this stage. As the co-sponsors of this historic process, the United States and Russia have demonstrated real perseverance and dedication in the face of serious problems. They will have Canada's continued strong support.

We also commend the parties directly involved. Leaders of the countries and peoples represented have already shown -- by their actions -- the vision and courage necessary to break the barriers built by decades of mistrust. They have taken this opportunity to sit down together, to begin to talk about building a peaceful Middle East. Ultimately, they will carry the burden of failure or the banner of success. It is the future of their children, and their peoples, that is at stake.

We also welcome the representatives of other states of the Middle East region who are joining this process for the first time. The breadth of vision and commitment to a peaceful future which their participation here today demonstrates is a portent of a promising tomorrow.

Mr. Chairmen, we recognize that some, whose participation is central to the establishment of peace in the Middle East, are not here today. We regret their absence and we continue to urge them to join fully in a process that we are convinced represents the best chance for peace.

We remain deeply concerned about the continuing threats to the process, caused by violence and intimidation, often by persons opposed to the concept of negotiation. We strongly urge those who genuinely support the process to maintain and strengthen their resistance to those efforts to sabotage it.

In particular, we call on all sides to speak clearly, with one voice, to reject violence and to avoid provocative words and actions. The reward that these negotiations offer is a very precious one and the price of failure is too serious to be risked.

Mr Chairmen, for too long the problems that have divided Arabs and Israelis in the Middle East have sustained an environment of insecurity, misery, hopelessness and fear. The negotiations that lie ahead will be long and arduous. Serious fundamental problems must be addressed in the direct bilateral negotiations. But we also believe that the international community has a role to play in helping the parties address some of the broader questions which affect the region as a whole. Canada also believes that the

UN, with its lengthy experience and practical expertise in the region, may well have a role to play. But all of us can bring our own experience and expertise in multilateral negotiations to help address regional issues. Some of these efforts can begin now by focusing on areas and themes, such as those already suggested, with others to be added later, we hope, as confidence builds.

We in Canada are ready to bring to this common effort Canada's own particular skills in several areas. Among these are our multilateral involvement in arms control and verification, in non-proliferation, in peacekeeping and conflict resolution and in a variety of developmental fields. We are ready to participate, in particular, in the working groups on water and on arms' control. We would be willing to host in Canada, meetings of these working groups, as appropriate. We have also noted, with great interest and support, references by other speakers to the question of refugees. Canada also believes that this sensitive and important issue deserves the most serious attention.

Mr. Chairmen, distinguished delegates, we are on the brink of a better future. But we must not exaggerate what the non-regional countries can bring even to this multilateral process. In the work that is launched as a result of this first meeting, we must strive to create in the populations of the region a realization that genuine peace is possible. We must help to create a belief that the future holds promises that the present cannot deliver.

Mr. Chairman, over the years, we in Canada have opened our doors to thousands of people from the Middle East region who have left their homes in search of a better future. Too often they have had no choice but to leave, driven away by war or internal conflict.

We believe that we must begin to build a tomorrow where fear of war has been banished from the region.

Our humanitarian experience has given us a particular appreciation for the values of diversity and tolerance. We believe that such tolerance can be enhanced through human contact, dialogue, travel and communication.

This multilateral process should, in our view, begin to address some of these questions. We believe that such contact and dialogue can contribute to an understanding and appreciation which will be a vital part of healing the wounds of the past.

We believe that respect for human dignity can, in turn, help to build societies in which all the people of the region can enjoy their full legal, social, political and human rights. This goal is already in the process of realization in other parts of the world. The people who live in the very cradle of civilization deserve no less.