

SPEAKING NOTES

**THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE**

**ON THE OCCASION OF A DINNER
IN HONOUR OF A DELEGATION FROM OMAN**

**OTTAWA
JUNE 3, 2010**

Your Excellency Yehya Bin Mahfooz Al-Manthari,
Honourable Senators and Members of the House of Commons,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Welcome to the Senate and to these historic chambers of the Speaker. It is a particular pleasure to welcome my colleague, the Chairman of the State Council of Oman, and the members of his delegation to our capital city. On behalf of all Canadian Senators, may I tell you how delighted we are that you have come to Canada.

Your visit gives us a chance to continue building the strong relationship between our two countries. Speaker Al-Manthari, we are grateful for the opportunity to discuss the situation in Oman and the Gulf region with someone of your knowledge and experience.

On a personal note, it is a privilege to be able to repay the warm hospitality I enjoyed when I led a parliamentary delegation to Oman in 2008. Although our stay in your country was all too short, we had the opportunity to immerse ourselves in Oman's long, rich history and learn about its generous people.

Your visit will aid the on-going efforts of Canadian parliamentarians to improve their understanding of the Middle East and the Muslim World. Oman is an ideal partner in these endeavours. Our two countries have enjoyed warm and flourishing relations for over thirty years. Your geographic position, as well as a population that includes people from many parts of the world, gives you a unique vantage point.

Canadian parliamentarians have taken steps to improve their understanding of the region and the Muslim world. In 2004, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade completed a long-term study exploring Canada's relations with countries of the Muslim world. My colleague the Speaker of the House of Commons and I have met with our counterparts in a number of these countries.

In seeking to further our understanding of the Muslim world, discussions such as this will expand our knowledge. The conversations we will have – both formally and informally – will help strengthen an already flourishing and productive relationship.

Our interest in countries of the Muslim world is partly due to the nearly 580,000 Muslims already in Canada, which is close to 2% of our population. This growing group provides a link to the cultural heritage of the Muslim world and also helps to ensure that our ties with countries such as Oman remain strong.

Canada and Oman cooperate in many fields, and I am particularly pleased to note that education is one. There is a scholarship program to assist Omani students sent to Canada by your government. In recognition of the outstanding efforts by His Highness Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Al Said to promote education in Oman, the University of Ottawa presented him with an honorary doctorate.

Your Excellency, your visit builds on Canada's on-going engagement in the region. When Canadian Parliamentarians are called upon to make decisions, they try to be as well-informed on the issues as possible. In a world that is becoming more interconnected with each passing day, we need to learn more about our partners. In dealing with issues such as security, health, and the environment, it is essential to establish and maintain good relations, because only by sharing information will we be able to make the best decisions.

It has been my privilege to meet with parliamentarians from around the world during the last few years. I have come away from each meeting with a better understanding of the challenges that we all face. Even in this age of instant communication, face-to-face contact cannot be replaced.

Our meetings with you and your colleagues will help dissolve the physical and cultural distances between us. We hope to develop a better understanding of your concerns on many issues, and we look forward to providing you with the Canadian perspective.

In closing, Chairman Al-Manthari, we would like to reaffirm and salute our friendship with the Omani people. On behalf of the Senate of Canada, I hope you and the members of your delegation find your stay in Ottawa both interesting and helpful.