

SPEAKING NOTES
THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE

ON THE OCCASION OF A LUNCHEON FOR THE
COUNCIL OF ARAB LEAGUE AMBASSADORS TO CANADA

March 2, 2010
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 201 Sussex Drive
Ottawa

Assalam Alaikum

Saad'at Al-saa'feer Howar Ziad, Saf'ear Daw'lat Al-Iraq waa Ameen Maj'less Sof'araa Dowal Jame'aat Al-Dowal Al-Araab'eyah fee Canada. Saa'dat Sofara'aa Al-Ker'aam wa Al-Hoo'dhor Al-Moh'tar'ameen

You Excellency Howar Ziad Ambassador of the Republic of Iraq and
Dean of the Council of Ambassadors of the Arab League to Canada,
Valued Ambassadors and respected guests.

Awad Ann Ashk'oraak Alaa Daa'watek lee taw'jeeh khe'taab lee Majleskom
Al Mowakar

I would like to thank you for your kind invitation to address the
Respected Council

Saad'at Al-Safeer Osamah Al-Sanosi Ahmad, Saf'ear Al-Mamlakah Al-
Arabiah Al-Saoudiah fee Canada

Your Excellency Osamah Al-Sanosi Ahmad, Ambassador of the
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Canada

Awad An Owa'jeh shoo'kr Kh'ass le Sa'adatek alaa Karam Al-Dyafah waa
hossn Al-Tarheeb

I would like to sincerely thank you for the kind hospitality and the warm
welcome.

This is an excellent occasion to reflect upon the amity built between our respective countries over recent decades. It is also an opportunity to look forward, to ponder the potential for forming new bonds, to explore avenues for expanding our existing friendships, and to nurture relationships that have room to grow.

At first glance, our countries are very different. Besides the obvious differences in climate and geography, the contrasts between us – historical and cultural – are striking.

Yours are lands home to ancient civilizations, while Canada is a relatively young country, whose society includes both aboriginal peoples and many recent immigrants from a wide variety of cultures.

Despite these differences, and despite the physical distance between our countries, we are not that far apart. Our nations are linked in many ways. Our gathering here today is just one of the bridges of cooperation that help to connect us as we build common understandings and better relationships. Ultimately, we have many common goals. Our common visions are shared at the multilateral level, where our countries collaborate in different fora.

This is reflected in our important work at the United Nations, work that enables us to address areas where we have mutual interests, such as development, energy security, trade, education, counter-terrorism, regional peace and security, sustainable resource management and coordinated responses to international health crises.

As partners in the G20, Saudi Arabia and Canada played an important role in the Group's far-reaching response to the economic crisis.

Parliamentary diplomacy also plays a role in establishing and maintaining ties between nations. Canadian parliamentarians learn from their counterparts in other countries, a reciprocal arrangement that has redounded to the benefit of all concerned. Members of the Senate and the House of Commons regularly meet with their counterparts in international fora, including the Inter-Parliamentary Union. My colleagues on both sides of our Parliament have examined and made recommendations to the government about political and commercial relations.

There have been any number of exchanges in recent years. In 2007, it was my privilege to lead a Senate delegation to Libya to enhance relations between our countries. That same year, Dr. Ali Errishi, Minister of Immigrants and Refugees of the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya visited Canada.

Canadian parliamentarians have also become more involved in building relationships and fostering mutual understanding between and among nations. The visit of a delegation of members of Canada's House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates in June 2007 is one example.

The Senate has been an active participant, and I had the privilege of leading a parliamentary delegation to Kuwait, Yemen and Oman in January 2008. On that visit, we discussed ways in which we could enhance relations between Canada and these three countries. We also took stock of important regional issues, such as the stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the future of Iraq, and the Middle East Peace Process.

Studies by committees have also taken Canadian Parliamentarians abroad to learn about best practices and experiences from other countries. One example is our Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, which visited the United Arab Emirates during the course of its study of port security.

While good relations between and among governments and parliamentarians are vital, we must not lose sight of the fact that relations between our countries can also be strengthened through people-to-people interactions, including cultural and academic exchanges.

These exchanges are essential if we are to build lasting relationships. In addition to gaining cultural insight, increasing our understanding of each other's perspectives will enable us to support and assist one another in times of need, and in a manner that is the most beneficial.

We all recognize the powerful effects of the recent financial crisis and global economic downturn. They have illuminated the interconnected nature of our globalized economy, and demonstrated the need for cooperation and coordinated efforts to overcome shared challenges.

From an economic perspective, there has been increased awareness in Canada of the importance of our relations with countries in the Gulf and Middle East region. In December 2009, I had the pleasure of visiting the United Nations in New York.

During the course of that visit,

the exciting economic advances made by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) were brought to our attention. Over the last decade, significant progress was made in terms of the growth of trade and investment between Canada and the GCC. Over time

our trade has grown steadily, and in 2008 Canadian exports to the Middle East and Africa reached a five-year high of nearly 10.3 billion dollars.

As GCC countries and those in the wider Middle East and North Africa region assume an increasingly important role in the global economy, Canadian companies and officials have worked to build partnerships in the region.

In 2007, Canada's Minister of International Trade led a mission to the United Arab Emirates to pursue greater trade, investment and business cooperation. Such journeys reflected a growing recognition of the need to capitalize on our mutual interests in the areas of global investment, engineering, financial services, infrastructure, and oil and gas development.

These visits were followed by another Ministerial visit to the United Arab Emirates in March 2009, where an agreement on economic cooperation, trade and investment was signed.

In June 2009, Stockwell Day, Minister of International Trade, travelled to Saudi Arabia and Jordan to build on the economic and commercial relations between our governments and businesses. In Jordan, the Minister signed the legal texts of a free trade agreement. Also, The Honourable Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs, travelled to Libya and Saudi Arabia in October 2009.

In addition to the commitment to strengthened bilateral relations, our countries share a belief in the need for concerted efforts in fostering international peace, stability and prosperity.

In the international arena, Canada's involvement in efforts to bring peace and security to the Middle East and North African region dates back almost 50 years. Our involvement stems from the conviction that Canada's security and well-being is tied to the security and well-being of other countries in the world.

If parliamentarians are to contribute to peace and security, it is important that we have a good appreciation of the people who live in these regions. By participating in direct channels of communication, we develop a better understanding of the region's aspirations, concerns, and dynamics.

Just as importantly, Canada and regions of Arab countries have vast reserves of natural resources and are petroleum-producing nations. Canada also produces wood, minerals and agricultural products. We know the importance of being good stewards

of our land and our resources, because we realize that many of these reserves are not renewable.

As both an exporter and importer of oil, Canadians recognize the interdependence between producing and consuming countries. In Canada, we have no choice but to consume energy. We must keep our houses warm in the winter and move people and goods across our huge country. At the same time, we are making efforts to conserve energy.

So, although our countries are physically far apart, everyone recognizes how important it is that all countries work together to ensure economic, security, and environmental cooperation.

This luncheon also gives me a chance to speak about the situation in Canada and our Canadian Parliament. People often think of Canada as a land of forests and wheat fields, overlooking our modernized economy and the fact that we have become one of the world's most urbanized countries.

Our population has become more and more diverse over the last quarter-century. While originally consisting mostly of descendants of French and British settlers, Canada now includes people from all parts of the globe. Increasingly, our immigrants come from non-European countries, with our latest Census showing that nearly 350,000 Canadians are of Arab origin. This changing cultural makeup is reflected in Parliament. As new immigrants have become established, they turn their thoughts to participating in the political system; today we have parliamentarians from many cultural groups.

Canadian parliamentarians are also encouraged by the recent commitments to democracy in the Middle East, particularly in countries represented here in the Council. The transitions are not always easy, however, and it takes time for people to adjust to new ways of doing things.

During my time as Speaker of the Senate, I have had the chance to meet with diplomatic representatives from around the world. Each meeting provides me with a better understanding of the challenges we all face today and the means to deal with them. Even in this age of instant communication, there is no substitute for face-to-face contact.

In closing, let me say how pleased I am to have been invited to speak with the Council. This is an excellent opportunity to share views on the global challenges facing our countries, and to identify constructive ways of moving forward.