

**SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE HONOURABLE  
NOËL A. KINSELLA, SPEAKER OF THE SENATE,  
ON THE OCCASION OF A DINNER HOSTED BY THE CHARGÉ  
D’AFFAIRES OF CANADA TO SAUDI ARABIA**

Mr. Hage,  
Honourable parliamentarians,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of all members of the delegation, please allow me to begin by thanking our host, Mr. Robert Hage, Chargé d’Affaires of Canada, for his warm hospitality in hosting this dinner. It is a great honour to be in Riyadh for the G20 Speakers’ Consultation and to join you here tonight, as it provides us with a wonderful opportunity to meet you all.

Mr. Hage, in your long career with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, you have served your country with distinction. You have gained a wealth of experience in postings around the world, including Washington, Lagos, Paris, and as Deputy Head of the Canadian Mission to the European Union in Brussels; you have held leadership positions in Ottawa; and you served as Ambassador to Hungary and Slovenia. Canada is fortunate to have you as a representative in Saudi Arabia today.

As Mr. Hage can surely attest to, relations between Canada and Saudi Arabia have significantly evolved over the years. While the differences between our countries are striking – in terms of language, culture and geography – it does not mean that we lack common ground. Indeed, Canada and Saudi Arabia have developed a strong relationship since the establishment of diplomatic ties nearly forty years ago.

Trade is an important component of the relationship between our two nations. Saudi Arabia is Canada's second largest export destination in the Middle East, and its largest source of imports from the region. The majority of trade between our two countries consists of energy products from Saudi Arabia, as well as agricultural products and rail transportation from Canada. As trade and energy are a priority for both our countries, it is vital that we continue to work together on these issues. In our meetings today, we discussed the role of energy in sustainable development and its importance to economic growth and social welfare. These discussions will go a long way in enhancing our understanding of the issues at stake and, in turn, will help us find common solutions going forward.

Our countries cooperate closely at the trade level, but we work together on other issues as well. In our session today on the Global Dialogue of Cultures, we discussed the importance of the exchange of ideas between different religions and cultures, and the role it can play in promoting peace and reducing international conflicts. This is not the first time Canada and Saudi Arabia have worked together in this area: at the G20 Summit held in Toronto in July 2010, King Abdullah established a Chair for Dialogue among Civilizations at the University of Toronto. These are just some of the many ways that leaders and parliamentarians in Canada and Saudi Arabia can continue to work together to increase our ties, foster mutual understanding, and address important global issues.

Progress has been made and there are many opportunities remaining to expand Canada's relationship with Saudi Arabia. Education can play an important role in this. There are currently 15,000 Saudi students in Canada, which includes 800 physicians and specialists who provide care to the Canadian population. These educational exchanges help to promote knowledge sharing and foster connections between our nations.

Another important way of doing this is through G20 Speakers' Consultations, where we, as legislators, come together to discuss best practices and policy solutions that we can take back to our respective parliaments. Tomorrow we will be discussing the financial crisis and the global economy. In the context of the current sovereign debt crisis in Europe and as countries around the world continue to grapple with the consequences of the 2008 economic and financial crisis, it is of the utmost importance that we participate in such dialogues. They are important opportunities for us to enhance our understanding of the economic challenges we face in each of our countries and globally, but also to foster cooperation on other issues of importance to our two countries, such as peace, security and humanitarian affairs.

In closing, please join me in raising a toast to Mr. Hage. On behalf of the delegation, I would like to once again thank you for your gracious hospitality tonight, and for your commitment to fostering a fruitful relationship between Canada and Saudi Arabia.