

**TOAST TO BE GIVEN BY SPEAKER KINSELLA AT A RECEPTION
HOSTED BY THE KUWAITI AMBASSADOR TO CANADA**

Your Excellency Ambassador al-Haroun,
Honourable parliamentarians,
Distinguished guests:

Assalaam alaykum (Sah-lah'-ahm-ah-lay'-kehm)

Ambassador, you have been Kuwait's representative in Canada since 2005. During this time, you have made quite an impression. Canadians were especially grateful when you recently presented medals to servicemen and women who had served in the 1991 Gulf War.

In addition, last summer you made a further contribution to the good relations between our countries when you donated money to universities to promote their Arabic studies programs. This will play a significant long term role in improving the understanding of Islamic and Arabic culture in Canada.

There could hardly be two more different countries than Kuwait and Canada. The contrasts between us – historical, cultural and geographical – are striking. Yet, despite these differences, our two countries have forged a strong relationship.

As you know, Canada's population has become more and more diverse over the last quarter century. Increasingly, our immigrants come from non-European countries. Indeed, our 2001 Census showed that nearly 350,000 Canadians were of Arab origin, and that number has no doubt gone up.

Another factor to consider is the rapid rate of growth of Canada's Muslim population, which has more than doubled in a decade. Indeed, our 2001 Census showed that there are now nearly 580,000 Muslims in Canada, or about 2% of the population. These Muslim Canadians provide a link to the rich cultural heritage of the Muslim world and help cement our ties with countries such as Kuwait.

Canadian businesspeople and diplomats have been building partnerships with Kuwait, and it is vital that Canadian parliamentarians play their part. Indeed, Canadian parliamentarians have taken a number of steps to improve their understanding of the region and the Muslim world. In 2004, our 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. Our talks here will help build on these efforts.

If parliamentarians are to contribute to peace and security in the region, it is crucial that we have an honest appreciation of the people who live here. Through direct contact we can develop a better understanding of the region's dynamics.

During my time as Speaker of the Senate, I have had the chance to meet with parliamentarians from around the world. I have come away from each meeting with a better understanding of how to deal with the challenges that we all face today. Even in this age of instant communication, such face-to-face contact cannot be replaced.

Ambassador al-Haroun, on behalf of my colleagues, let me close by thanking you and your staff once again for helping make our visit a success. Be assured that once we have returned home, we will continue to pay close attention to developments in Middle East generally and Kuwait in particular.

Ambassdor al-Haroun, on behalf of my colleagues, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for hosting this wonderful reception.

Shukran (Shook-rah'n)