

**TOAST GIVEN BY SPEAKER KINSELLA TO THE
SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF KUWAIT**

Your Excellency Speaker Al-Kharafi
Honourable parliamentarians,
Distinguished guests:

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

First of all, allow me to tell you how pleased we are to be here, and to thank you for your warm welcome. Thanks to the time you have spent with us, we have learned a great deal about your country, your people, and your culture.

Your Excellency, I would like to thank you in particular. You play an important role in the public life of Kuwait, and have a wealth of experience as Speaker. It is an honour to be able to learn about Kuwait from someone with such indepth knowledge.

This visit by a parliamentary delegation is part of the on-going efforts by Canadian parliamentarians to improve their understanding of the Middle East and the Muslim World.

Kuwait is an ideal partner in these endeavours. Our two countries have enjoyed warm and flourishing relations for more than forty years. During the Persian Gulf War, Canada played a major role in liberating Kuwait. Canadian companies are active here, trade between us is growing, and Kuwaiti students are travelling to Canada to pursue their post-secondary education.

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.

One reason for our interest in countries of the Muslim world is that Canada's Muslim population is growing rapidly. 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.

Despite the distances between Canada and the Middle East – both physical and cultural – Canada has long been an active player in this region. Canada's involvement in international efforts to secure peace in the region dates back almost 50 years. Our armed forces have participated in many peacekeeping missions and our diplomats have worked to find solutions to the region's problems. The Canadian International Development Agency has helped with development and humanitarian assistance. Our business people have contributed to your growth and development. Our involvement has led to the creation of strong personal ties, and these are becoming increasingly important.

Our visit here builds on Canada's on-going engagement in the region. Parliamentarians owe it to our citizens to be well informed when we make decisions. In a world that is becoming more interconnected with each passing day, it is incumbent upon us 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 right decisions.

Our meetings with our Kuwaiti counterparts have helped dissolve the physical and cultural distances between us. Already, we have developed a much better understanding of the challenges you face, and we have been able to tell you about the Canadian perspective on many issues.

We will return to Canada with much to ponder, and once back home, we will continue to follow developments here.

In closing, Your Excellency, on behalf of my colleagues, allow me to express once again our deep gratitude for your warm hospitality. May the friendships we have formed grow and blossom.

Shukran (Shook-rah'n')