

SPEAKING NOTES
THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA
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ON THE OCCASION OF THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CANADA-LEBANON
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

Your Excellency,
Honourable Senators,
Members of Parliament,
Members of the Delegation,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the Senate. I am pleased that you were able to join us in this historic room as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Canada-Lebanon Inter-parliamentary Group.

The organisation began thirty years ago as the Canada-Lebanon Friendship Group and friendship remains at the core of the organization. We have with us this evening the Honourable Marcel Prud'homme, who was instrumental in founding the group and who has been a key member ever since.

Our two countries have long-standing links, with the first Lebanese settling in Canada in the late-nineteenth century. Today there are almost a quarter of a million Lebanese-Canadians, and they have enriched this country. Among their many admirable traits are entrepreneurship and an ingrained work ethic. These are a formidable combination, of course, and help explain the reputation the Lebanese have in business.

Our guest of honour, Mr. Fouad Makhzoumi, is a fine example of the kind of success which can be achieved with these traits. He also illustrates how an entrepreneurial spirit can go hand in hand with philanthropic endeavours.

Many Lebanese-Canadians have also achieved notable results in business, and in other areas as well, including arts and politics. Paul Anka, the renowned songwriter and performer, and Joseph Ghiz, the former premier of Prince Edward Island, are two well-known successes. In addition to pursuing personal goals, the Lebanese in Canada have won respect by taking an active part in society. One measure which comes readily to mind is voter turnout, which is well above average. According to a Statistics Canada survey, Lebanese-Canadians are proud of their heritage but have a strong sense of belonging in Canada.

Canada's long-standing relationship with Lebanon has evolved in response to that country's changes. After the 2006 conflict, Prime Minister Harper announced the creation of the Lebanon Relief Fund. In May of this year, Canada's Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism announced funding to support continuing electoral reform in Lebanon to increase the institutional capacity, transparency and accountability of elections.

Electoral reform is naturally a topic of interest to an inter-parliamentary group, and I am confident that voters in Lebanon will continue to participate as actively as possible in the democratic process there, and that there will be further scope for this participation in the near future. This would be an important step to peace and stability, something that friends wish for each other.

As we mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of this group, we should keep in mind that the contacts and friendships which have been formed through this organization have helped strengthen the ties between our nations, personally, politically, economically and culturally.

I will conclude with that and hope that you enjoy the rest of the evening.