

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

**ON THE OCCASION OF
A VISIT TO THE SENATE CHAMBER BY
H. E. DR. ABDULLAH MOHAMMED AL-SHEIKH,
SPEAKER OF THE MAJLIS ASH-SHURA CONSULTATIVE
COUNCIL OF THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA, AND
A SAUDI ARABIAN DELEGATION**

**SENATE CHAMBER
NOVEMBER 10, 2014**

Your Excellency Dr. Abdullah Bin Mohammed Bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh,
Your Excellency Ambassador AlSudairy,
Honourable members of the Saudi Arabian delegation,

As-salaam alaikum.

Marhaba bekum fi Majlis Alsh-Yaoukh al Kanadi.

It is a pleasure to welcome all of you this morning to this magnificent chamber, which is a source of great pride for all Canadians. As you look around the room, you may be interested to consider some of the similarities and differences between the Senate of Canada and the Majlis Ash-Shura of Saudi Arabia.

Overhead, the chamber is illuminated by the immense black-bronze chandeliers weighing two tons each. Your gaze then sweeps

across the ceiling lined with gold and the crests of our founding peoples. Circling the room are carvings which include griffons, lions, otters and unicorns – a fabled bestiary contained within the oak panels and limestone friezes.

The eight paintings on the walls depict scenes of the First World War, serving as reminders to lawmakers of the importance of wise government. Beneath the paintings lies a frieze carved in the panelling of Canadian white oak, showing Canada's flora and fauna.

This chamber evokes Canada's history, and I would like to take this opportunity to speak briefly about the history and function of the Senate, along with some comparisons to the Majlis Ash-Shura.

One hundred and fifty years ago, at the Quebec Conference of 1864, the Fathers of Confederation designed what would become the Parliament of Canada. Inspired by the British model, they adapted it to the Canadian context and gave it the power to make laws for "Peace, Order and Good Government."

The government of Saudi Arabia is, of course, unicameral, with the Majlis Ash-Shura serving as the sole parliamentary body in its home at Al Yamamah Palace. In Canada, we have a bicameral system which stems from that decision of 1864 and which consists of the two chambers located here at Centre Block. These are the Senate, where we

are standing, and what we Senators refer to as “the other place,” better known as the House of Commons.

In the Majlis ash-Shura, Council Members develop and propose laws, though the power to enact lies ultimately with the King. In Canada, both the Senate and the House of Commons can propose bills along the path to becoming laws, but they too must be ultimately approved by our monarch, the Queen. This approval, or “Royal Assent,” is usually granted through the Queen’s representative in Canada, the Governor General, whom you met earlier this morning.

This Chamber is unique in that it is the only place in Canada where these three components of our democratic government – the Queen, the elected House of the Commons, and the appointed Senate – gather to transact the nation’s business. Red is the colour of royalty, and the Crown’s special connection with this Chamber is evident in the red carpet, the red seats, and, most tellingly, the red thrones.

The primary role of the Senate is to provide a balancing mechanism for the governing of our federation. This balancing reflects everything senators do and it can be seen in each of our institution’s three primary roles: representation; investigation; and legislation.

In its representative role, the Senate reflects the regional and cultural makeup of Canada. 105 Senators represent all regions and provinces of the country, with over half of the Senate seats representing

the less populated regions of our land. Canada's three founding peoples – Aboriginal, British and French – are represented in the Senate, along with many of our nation's ethnic communities.

38% of Senators are women, giving our Senate one of the world's highest representation records in this area. In the House of Commons, the figure is currently 25%. It bears noting that the worldwide average for upper or single parliamentary chambers is 22%, up from 16% just ten years ago. Along with many Canadians, I am highly supportive of the royal decree by King Abdulaziz last year to appoint 30 women to the Shura Council of 150 members, and to ensure that women always occupy at least 20% of Council seats. His Excellency Dr. Al-Sheikh is especially to be commended for his leadership in guiding the successful implementation of this truly significant initiative.

The second role of our Senate is that of investigation. Senators bring vast knowledge and experience as they explore, promote awareness and seek Canadian views on a wide range of issues. Much of their investigative work takes place through committees, which hold hearings, conduct research, and turn the spotlight on social, political and economic issues of importance to Canada and its citizens. This is an aspect of our Senate which we share in common with the Majlis ash-Shura, as I understand that much of your policy development and advisory work is also achieved through specialized committees.

The Senate's third role is to examine, revise and propose legislation. Recognizing that every system needs checks and balances, Canada's Constitution requires both the Senate and the House of Commons to approve legislation separately. This dual-chamber structure ensures that laws are not passed too quickly and that interested parties have a chance to express their views.

Turning briefly to my own role as Speaker of the Senate, the primary responsibility under the Rules of the Senate is to "preserve order and decorum and to decide points of order subject to an appeal to the Senate." Speaker Al-Sheikh, as you can appreciate, people can be very outspoken about certain issues, and while the open exchange of perspectives is essential, the voice of moderation is often an important one.

I hope that during your time in Ottawa, you might become more familiar with Canada's history, culture, and government. I am sure we can all agree that with a greater understanding of the distinct and similar aspects between our institutions, the more effectively our two countries can collaborate on our common goals.

Thank you. Shukran.