

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON CANADA-ARAB RELATIONS

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

November 26-27, 2011

Holiday Inn, La Chaudière, 2 rue Montcalm, Gatineau, Qc

WINDS OF CHANGE IN THE ARAB WORLD: IMPLICATIONS FOR CANADA ARAB RELATIONS

The Context

Change is sweeping across the Arab world that Canadians of all backgrounds are watching with intense interest. That the people of Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Bahrain and other Arab countries have risen up in the millions to demand their rights as free citizens is a cause for hope. They have done this in the face of overwhelming state resistance to change and at considerable personal risk. Thousands have died but this has not deterred the spontaneous mobilization of youth and citizens of all economic and social backgrounds in these countries and others in the Middle East and North Africa.

While discontent has long been simmering most analysts and western governments did not foresee the extent of the popular uprisings. The fall of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia, the Ghaddafi regime in Libya and the end of the Mubarak regime in Egypt were the first victims to the popular discontent of the Arab peoples with their regimes. Other countries in the region are also vulnerable and they must move to establish broader democratic rights or face the prospect that legitimate uprisings may bring an end to their rule or force them to hang on to power through force of arms and violent repression of their citizens. Throughout the Arab world, citizens are continuing to rise up against decades of suppression of their political rights and corrupt regimes whose leaders have enriched themselves at the expense of their peoples.

This appalling situation has been tolerated, if not purposefully supported by, most Western nations even as they called for democratic reform. The West has too often turned a blind eye to the corruption, the political repression, the abuse of human rights and the inadequate efforts at democratic reform. It is time for Western governments to change their approach. Our governments must no longer claim that our support for these autocratic regimes ensures regional stability and stems off the threat of Islamic terrorism. These claims are red herrings which enable the smothering of civil society and the repression of legitimate opposition movements in the region.

The real issue here is the move towards democracy and freedom for all the peoples of the region and that is something we think the Canadian people will strongly welcome: this should be the basis for our policies as the situation evolves.

Canadian relations with the region can improve on all levels if we actively support the democratic reforms being sought by the ordinary citizens. The large Arab Canadian population of some 600,000 strong left their countries mostly in the past 20 years looking for a better life but also to escape the political repression of their regimes. These Canadians espousing the democratic values and freedoms of all Canadians will be ambassadors for the building of strong relations with the region if we pursue the democratic option including supporting the rule of law and international law for all countries.

Canada has an opportunity now to re-energize our relations with the region through progressive diplomacy, trade, education, cultural exchanges and official development assistance. Canadians of all stripes have an interest in seeing their government genuinely support human rights; democracy, freedom and the rule of law - not just pay lip service to these principles. Pursuing skewed and rigid ideologies in our policies does not make sense, not for Canadians and not for the peoples of the Arab World.

The conference will endeavour to develop ideas and directions for both national and international policy making that our government and civil society organisations can consider as we develop our relations with the Arab governments and their peoples through the pursuit of democracy, human rights and adherence to international law at home and abroad, including through our international institutions. Our particular emphasis will focus on positions and actions that Canada and Canadians can take to play a stronger role on these principles in our relations with the Arab world.

PROPOSED PROGRAMME

Saturday November 26

8:30 Registration

9:00 **Welcome and Opening Remarks:** David Comerford, President of NCCAR

9:15 **Opening Address:** Paul Heinbecker, Center for International Governance and Innovation, former Canadian Ambassador to the UN

Theme: Canada and the Arab World: Recent Developments and Future Prospects

10:30 **Panel 1: Root Causes of the Uprisings in the Arab World and Prospects for Sustainable Democratic Change**

Panellists:

1. Dr. Rex Brynen, Professor, McGill University
2. Dr. May Telmissany, Associate Professor, University of Ottawa
3. Dr. Noomane Raboudi, Assistant Professor, University of Ottawa
4. Dr. Bessma Momani, Associate Professor, University of Waterloo

Moderator: Peter Larson, Secretary, NCCAR Board

12:00 Lunch

Luncheon Address: Dr. Trevor Purvis – Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Law, Carleton University

Theme: Canada's standing in the Arab World – Moving forward in these historic times

MC: Dr. Qais Ghanem

13:30 **Panel 2: Canadian Relations with the Arab World: Perspectives from former Canadian diplomats**

Panellists:

1. Ambassador Michael Shenstone (Saudi Arabia/Yemen)
2. Ambassador Ferry de Kerckhove (Egypt)
3. Ambassador Louis Delvoie (Algeria), Adjunct professor of international relations, Queen's University and Royal Military College of Canada
4. Ambassador Michael Bell (Jordan, Egypt), Senior Scholar of International Diplomacy at the University of Windsor

Moderator: Michel de Salaberry, Director, NCCAR Board, former Ambassador to Egypt, Jordan and Iran

15:00 Coffee Break

15: 20 SIMULTANEOUS WORKSHOPS: CANADA AND THE ARAB WORLD

Workshop A: Canadian ODA and civil society involvement in the Arab World – Impact on social development and democracy: How has Canada's ODA to the Arab World encouraged or hindered democratic development? What have been Canada's success stories in the region? What role have civil society organisations been playing in Arab countries?

Resource Person: Jean Devlin, former Director at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

Facilitator: David Comerford, President, NCCAR

Workshop B: Educational initiatives between Canada and the Arab World: People to people and academic institution exchange and investment: How are Canadian academic institutions active in the Arab World? What impact are they having on exchange of knowledge, values, ideas?

Resource Person: Karen McBride, CEO, Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE)

Facilitator: Linda Belanger, Director, NCCAR

Workshop C: Trade between Canada and the Arab World: A Tool for Democratization?: What Canadian businesses are active in the Arab World? What impact are they having in the Arab World? What relationship exists between trade and democratization?

Resource Person: Marlon Oneid, President of the Canadian-Lebanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Facilitator: Peter Larson, Secretary of NCCAR

19:00 Gala Dinner

Key Note Speaker: Dr. Clovis Maksoud, former Arab League Ambassador to the UN and currently Director of the *Center for the Global South* at the American University in Washington, DC.

Theme: Sustaining the Movement toward Democracy in the Arab World

MC: Michel de Salaberry, former Ambassador to Egypt, Jordan and Iran, Director NCCAR

Music: Rula Sherideh, Singer and musician from Ottawa who plays the guitar and the oud

Sunday, November 27

9:00 **Roundtable Discussion: Arab Canadian Organisations: Supporting the struggle for democracy in the Arab World**

Resource Persons:

1. Haroun Bouazzi, Collectif tunisien au Canada
2. Mohamad Jomaa, Canadian Lebanese Forum for Dialogue
3. Qais Ghanem, Yemeni Community Association
4. Mohammad Benbouchaib, L'Association marocaine de Gatineau
5. Iman Ibrahim, Canadians for Egypt
6. Nada Basir, Canadian Libyan Council
7. Palestinian Canadian Congress (TBC)
8. Syrian Association (TBC)

Facilitator: Rula Odeh, Director and Immediate Past President of NCCAR

10:30: Coffee Break

10:45 **Simultaneous Workshops: What actions can Canadians and the Canadian Government take to strengthen and build positive relations with peoples of the Arab world and their governments?**

Workshop A: What role for Canadian government, civil society and Arab Canadian Organisations (English workshop)

Facilitator: Doug Daniels, Vice President, NCCAR

Workshop B: What role for Canadian government, civil society and Arab/Maghreb Canadian Organisations (French workshop)

Facilitator: Linda Belanger, Director, NCCAR

12:00 **Synthesis of the National Conference** and recommendations to NCCAR
(Reports from the Workshops)

12:30 Lunch

Guest speaker: Nahlah Ayed, Foreign Correspondent with the CBC

MC: David Comerford, President, NCCAR

13:30 NCCAR Annual General Meeting of Members