

# **Annual Report 1999-2000**

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**NCCAR**

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## **Introduction**

Dear Member,

The purpose of this report is to highlight the activities and the projects of the NCCAR for the year 99-2000. Our programs are divided under three themes, which reflect the NCCAR's objective as a bridge between Canada and the Arab World.

In the year 2000, the NCCAR undertook a quantum leap, as you will realize from the activities and actions listed in this summery. Furthermore, we recognize that more could and should be done in order to fulfill the mandate of the NCCAR.

The board of directors, and the staff would like to thank you for your interest in the NCCAR and its objectives, and on behalf of all of us thank you for your continued support. We look forward to a many more years of activities that would create more understanding and rapprochement between Canada and the Arab World.

It is important, and we urge you provide us with your feedback and your suggestions. We hope that you will take the time to do so.

## **Profile**

The National Council on Canada-Arab Relations (NCCAR) is a non-profit organization incorporated under Part II of the Canada Corporation Act.

It was established in 1985 by Canadians who believe that our national interest is best served through expanded knowledge of the Arab World, and through social, scientific, and educational exchanges.

## **Objectives**

Canada has a reputation in the international community for fairness, respect for political diversity and support for the rule of law. To maintain these ideals, it is important that Canadians acquire a broader knowledge of and sensitivity to the Arab world, its aspirations and appreciation of its role in the human family.

The Council's goals are based on the belief that Canada and the Arab world share aspirations for world peace have a common interest in increased trade and desire expanded cultural and educational ties.

## **Activities**

The National Council will promote and assist programs to increase Canadian awareness and knowledge of the Arab world and of the expanding commercial, scientific, educational and cultural links between Canadian and Arab institutions.

Working with governments, private sector and community organizations, the National Council:

- § Promotes greater recognition of the contributions of Canadian of Arab origins;
- § Acts as a clearinghouse for information relating to the Arab world. Such information is made available to individuals, organizations, school, universities, libraries and the media, as well as provincial and federal governments.
- § Publishes a quarterly newsletter which serves the Council's educational objectives;
- § Maintains a speaker and lecture bureau to provide information and analysis to various educational and service organizations and the media;
- § Encourages study tours and speaker tours between Canada and the Arab World.
- § Sponsors a Parliamentary Internship Program for University Students,
- § Encourages the exchange of cultural and historical exhibitions between Canada and the Arab World,
- § Encourages balanced media coverage.
- § Youth International Internship Program (YIIP) in conjunction with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

## **The Organization**

The Council functions with an Ottawa based staff operating in conjunction with a fifteen member voluntary national Board of Directors.

The Council receives its financial support from members, corporations and foundations.

While all contributions are welcome and needed, contribution of \$100.00 or more entitles contributors to a voting membership in the Council.

## **A Word from the President.**

Our meeting today marks the end of one year and the beginning of a new one in the life

of the National Council on Canada Arab Relations. Last year was a very special year for us. The National Council matured into the leading Canadian Arab institution on the political map of Canada. Our voice rang loud in the corridors of power, over major TV stations, the leading national press and many national and local radio stations. We spoke one and all in both official languages of Canada and always in support of the human rights of our people and of those without power and voice. We have worked the Internet, expanded our network and communicated our views and those that we felt represent our stands to many of you and to all those that we targeted to reach. We went high-tech with a Web Page and our ArabiCa is alive and well beaming with our activities and achievements.

When President Saleh of Yemen with his entourage visited Canada, the National Council hosted an elaborate breakfast meeting for him where he spoke eloquently of his vision for a unified, strong and Arab Yemen. I spoke too in his honour and explained the pivotal role we play in building a bridge of friendship and co-operation between Canada and the Arab World and that we look forward and expect that Yemen will remain at the forefront of Arab drive towards just peace and open democracy.

We were there when Sheikha Mozza from Qatar was here. Our luncheon was a major occasion to cement new projects between Canada and Qatar in the fields of early education and training. The NCCAR was heavily involved in arranging activities and a forum for the parliamentary delegation from Kuwait and the Parliamentary delegation from Jordan.

When dignitaries and academicians from our region visit Canada we made it our business to arrange speaking engagements and tours in collaboration with our partners in the community. Drs. Salman Abu Sitta and Jad Isaac were only two examples of a larger involvement and commitment for our voices to be heard and for our positions to be aired.

I cannot but boast of our success in having the ear of the Prime Minister and our ability to bring together a most distinguished group of representatives of our communities to dialogue with the PM and ensure that our access to government is no less than any other group. The meeting was a resounding success if not in terms of immediate results, then in terms of the trust and respect we were able to build between us and the PM.

We now have an efficient organization with a fully functioning and elite Board, and highly effective office under the able leadership of Mazen. We lost Hala who provided us with an unwavering commitment and who so ably shepherded the development and expansion of our internship program.

To all of you, our best wishes for the holly seasons and for another productive and remarkable year. Without you this whole effort would not have been possible and above all would not have been meaningful.

## **Executive Directors' Report**

Fifteen years ago, the NCCAR was formed in the basement of the Syrian Church of St. George in Montreal. The founders of the organization realized early on the need to create an organization that would be able to articulate Canada's interest in having good relations with the Arab World. Firstly, the NCCAR became the vehicle to ensure that greater rapprochement between the two areas were improved. Secondly it became the voice of Canadian Arabs with the Federal government. Since then, Canada's policy on the Arab World has been incrementally changing for the better. It is not there yet, but it is on track. (In the next issue of ArabiCa, we will have a piece on the history of the Council)

I was hired by the NCCAR in October of 1999 as an executive director. I had heard of the Council, however, wasn't quite familiar with its role, objectives, influence, or history. It didn't take me long to realize that it is an organization that has been fundamental in improving Canada Arab relations. As well, from the first days of working at the Council I noticed that the potentials and the possibilities for this organization are endless.

The NCCAR has had fifteen years of dedicated work, of successes, failures, troubles, rich learning experience and most of all a realization that there is more work to be done. It is quite clear, as we begin a new century, that a new kind of organizations are needed, a new vision needs to be articulated, and more so a fundamental bridge needs to be reestablished; the bridge between the NCCAR and the Canadian Arab community.

A couple of questions need to be asked: is the council ready for a new vision? New ideas? And more importantly is the NCCAR in its current form the most appropriate vehicle to lead and change Canada's understanding of the Arab World and its issues?

The answer is unequivocal yes!

### **Why yes?**

The NCCAR, currently is one of, if not the only vehicle for bridging the gap between the two worlds. The most appropriate example about the need for the NCCAR, and its importance on the Federal scene, are our accomplishments in 1999-2000. The credibility, effectiveness, and capability of this organization were quite present in all the work that we engaged in this year. Could we have done more? Absolutely!

As this report will indicate, given the resources available at our disposal, the NCCAR fared extremely well in meeting its objectives. We do not claim to have fulfilled the whole mandate, for it is large enough to take many years, and decades to accomplish; but this is the challenge that will keep us a vibrant entity. We have succeeded on many fronts, we were able to influence, modify, articulate, and improve on many policies. There is more work to be done, and we promise to keep at it. However, we will need the support of the community, and those who have interest in seeing improved Canada Arab relations improved, to do it all.

The NCCAR has seen many changes in the last couple of years. New programs were initiated successfully, new staff were hired, more interest from the Arab and business communities, and politicians, larger outreach, and most of all more focus. At this point in our work we are building strategies for the next five years. We have focused our objectives on three areas; education, political representation, and trade relations.

As the report indicates, our education programs are very ambitious, however they are being delivered effectively through our traditional venues, and through the support of partners. It is a large objective, and no matter how strong of an organization, the need to establish partnerships is fundamental. For that we thank our current partners, and hope to cultivate the one that we are negotiating with.

For our role on political representation, the NCCAR is engaged on regular basis in dialogue with key governmental departments, and officials to ensure that Arab issues are highlighted, areas for improvement are discussed, and misunderstandings are finessed. We will exhaust all possibilities to ensure that fair and accurate representations of the issues are clearly articulated. We do so through the use of expert opinions, negotiations, and support from our friends.

The third area of interest to the NCCAR is the trade and economic relations between the Arab world and Canada. Although, the Council has been involved in business to business introductions, and negotiations, this year marks the first year that we have focused on expanding our role in that area. There is niche for the NCCAR to play, and our mandate allows us to move in that direction. Furthermore, improving Canada Arab trade is another hub in the wheel of better understanding, and appreciation in today's international relations or globalization.

Having said that, there are a number of challenges for the NCCAR to carry on with its programs and initiatives. The most difficult challenge is the funding and acquisition of resources. As the mandate and the need for the Council to be visible, and proactive in its approach, more resources are required. Funding for projects, staff, and initiatives are fundamental to ensure that a professional and dedicated staff is capable at achieving their objectives. This is why we are seeking new areas of funding.

Secondly, the NCCAR needs to have a dependable, and active membership. The organization need to be accountable to its members, and needs to rely on their support and dedication. The NCCAR has a modest number of active members. The objective is to have a membership of a 1000 in the next three years. This is of utmost significance to us.

Finally, this past year, as the report indicates, we had the opportunity to experiment with a number of areas, untested before by the NCCAR. The experience proved fruitful and enriching. We have learned great lessons, we realized our strength and weaknesses, and most of all we have right now a plan that we feel will carry us into the new millennium with confidence.

I am proud to present you this report, and I look forward to many more years of working with the NCCAR, its staff, board, and membership.

Sincerely,

Mazen Chouaib