



**Visit of the Honourable Geoff Regan, P.C., M.P.,
Speaker of the House of Commons,
and a Parliamentary Delegation,
Lebanon and Jordan**

October 8 to 11, 2018

The Honourable Geoff Regan, P.C., M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons, led a parliamentary delegation on an official visit to Lebanon and Jordan from October 8 to 11, 2018.

The delegation has the honour of presenting its

Report

The Canadian delegation was composed of the following members:

- The Honourable Geoff Regan, P.C., M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons;
- Mr. David Christopherson, M.P.;
- Mr. Ziad Aboultaif, M.P.;
- Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury, M.P.;
- Mr. Brian Underhill, Chief of Staff, Office of the Speaker; and
- Ms. Caroline Massicotte, Secretary to the delegation.

Background – Lebanon

Canada and Lebanon maintain close ties given the sizeable population of Canadians with dual Lebanese-Canadian citizenship. It is estimated that between 60,000 and 75,000 Canadians are living in Lebanon at any given time, and that between 200,000 and 400,000 Lebanese live in Canada. The Lebanese community comprises the largest Arab ethnic group in Canada. Diplomatic relations were officially established in September 1954 and have been strengthened by mutual membership in *La Francophonie* and numerous other cultural connections.

In response to the crises in Iraq and Syria, Lebanon has recently assumed an important position in [Canada's Middle East engagement strategy](#). From 2016 to 2019, \$2 billion has been invested in humanitarian assistance to vulnerable persons, aid to communities affected by conflict to help build resilience, and enhanced Canadian diplomatic engagement in Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. The overarching goal of this strategy is to increase security and stability in the region.

Since 2016, Canada has spent over \$220 million to support stability and resilience in Lebanon, which is dealing with an influx of over 1 million Syrian refugees. Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita. These Syrian refugees are in addition to the Palestinians, Iraqis and Kurds who have already migrated to Lebanon. As part of Canada's accelerated Syrian refugee resettlement effort, more than half of the 20,000 refugees who arrived in Canada between November 2015 and February 2016, came through Lebanon.

As for its political system, Lebanon is a parliamentary democracy. Its constitution was adopted in 1926, while the country was under French rule, and has been amended several times since then. Under the 1943 National Pact and the 1989 Taif Agreement, the political system has both secular and religious dimensions, making it a denominational or sectarian system. As a result, the President must be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the Parliament a Shia Muslim. Since the Taif

Agreement came into effect and ended the Lebanese civil war of 1975–1990, the seats in the National Assembly (*Majlis Al-Nuwwab*) have been equally divided between Christians and Muslims. Governance is therefore subject to lengthy negotiations among the various sectarian groups which significantly impedes the functioning of the state.

A political deadlock lasting two and a half years was broken when Michel Aoun of the Free Patriotic Movement (a Maronite Christian party) was elected President for a six-year term on October 31, 2016, after 46 rounds of voting.

The President appoints the candidate selected by Parliament to the office of Prime Minister. As such, Saad Hariri was reappointed Prime Minister for a third term in May 2018, having held that position since November 2016.

The Prime Minister, in consultation with the President, appoints the Cabinet ministers, who each have executive powers. At the time of the delegation's visit, Mr. Hariri had not yet been able to form a Cabinet since the parliamentary election in May 2018, which was the first general election to be held in the past nine years.

In the meantime, Lebanon has been experiencing an economic crisis and has one of the highest levels of public debt in the world, with rising interest rates. In April 2018, France co-hosted the economic conference for development through reforms with the private sector (known by the French acronym CEDRE), a public-private event in support of Lebanon's economy. At the conference, over \$11 billion was promised to fund infrastructure investments and projects in Lebanon. In order to obtain these grants and contributions, Lebanon must implement a series of structural and sectoral reforms. While the reforms are necessary, they had not yet been implemented at the time of this visit.

Objectives – Lebanon

The goal of this visit was primarily to strengthen bilateral relations between Canada and Lebanon, against the backdrop of Canada's investment of over \$220 million through its Middle East Strategy. The visit enabled Speaker Regan and the delegation to discuss the role of Parliament with their counterparts and to promote transparency, accountability and good governance. It also offered an opportunity to create new avenues for collaboration on these issues. The delegates discussed the regional dynamics with Lebanese officials, including the Syrian refugee situation and its impacts on Lebanon. The visit was also an opportune time to encourage Lebanese officials to promptly form a government after the May 2018 election.

Meetings – Lebanon

In Beirut, Lebanon, the delegation met the following people:

- His Excellency Michel Aoun, President;
- His Excellency Saad Hariri, Prime Minister designate;
- His Excellency Nabih Berri, Speaker of the National Assembly;
- His Excellency Elie Ferzli, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly;
- Mr. Alain Aoun, Secretary of the National Assembly, M.P., and Mr. Assad Dergham, M.P.;
- Mr. Adnan Daher, Secretary General of the National Assembly; and
- General Adnan El Sheik Ali, Director of the Security of the National Assembly.

Meeting with His Excellency Michel Aoun, President

The President received the delegates at his residence in Baabda. Speaker Regan began by highlighting the important contribution made by the Lebanese community in Canada in numerous fields, including business, healthcare and the arts. He noted that in Nova Scotia, every citizen of Lebanese origin creates an average of 3.7 jobs. He said that Canada and Lebanon maintain close ties and that it is important to preserve and encourage these ties between the two countries, because they help form a better understanding of the respective opportunities and challenges. To that end, Speaker Regan asked the President for his views on the current economic and political situation in Lebanon.

President Aoun was pleased to receive the Canadian delegation and noted that Lebanon is currently facing several complex issues. On the subject of politics, he said that it is difficult to legislate at present, since the various political parties had not yet reached an agreement to form a new government. That said, he mentioned that he was confident that they would do so soon. He also acknowledged that structural reforms are necessary, and that transparency needs to be improved. On the subject of economics, President Aoun added that he believes that the massive influx of over 1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon since 2016 has had a considerable impact on education, crime, terrorism, employment, and infrastructure in general. He explained that this is the third time that Lebanon has been affected by neighbouring conflicts for which no definitive political solution had been found, citing the Cyprus and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. As a result, he said that he believes that efforts must be made to return the refugees to their country as soon as conditions are safe again. He underlined that the refugee problem is an international issue which calls for everyone's support, and the delegates concurred.

President Aoun gave Speaker Regan a copy of a document concerning his proposal to create the "Human Academy for Encounter and Dialogue." He sought Canada's support for Lebanon to become the official and permanent gathering place for dialogue among cultures, religions and ethnic groups. This global project, under the aegis of the United Nations, would create a forum for meetings, discussions and the promotion of diversity, in order to encourage acceptance and understanding among the peoples, cultures and religions of the world. After thanking the President, Speaker Regan informed him that he would share the document with the relevant decision-making bodies.

Speaker Regan then reiterated Canada's support for the prompt formation of a new Lebanese government and the implementation of economic reforms that would promote transparency and good governance in Lebanon.

Meeting with His Excellency Saad Hariri, Prime Minister designate

Received by Prime Minister designate Hariri at the Maison du Centre, Speaker Regan thanked him for taking the time to meet the delegation. He noted that the Lebanese diaspora in Canada creates jobs and that its contribution is very much appreciated. The discussions then turned to the refugee situation and the return of refugees to Syria. Speaker Regan said that Canada supports the voluntary and safe return of Syrian refugees. The Russian initiative for returning refugees was then discussed, and its advantages and disadvantages were raised.

Lebanon's precarious economic situation and the need to form a new government to implement reforms to fight corruption were then discussed. According to Prime Minister designate Hariri, although it will be difficult to cut spending and fight corruption, these reforms should be undertaken as quickly as possible. To do that, a new government must be formed. The Prime Minister designate said that he remains optimistic on that point and noted that many realize how critical the situation is. He also underlined that although the present situation is complicated, it offers enormous opportunities for innovation as well, such as public-private partnerships to finance infrastructure. Speaker Regan praised Lebanon's efforts to improve the government's accountability and transparency and mentioned several initiatives that could be implemented in support of those goals.

Speaker Regan also talked about the efforts needed to improve women's representation in Parliament and break down systemic barriers. He noted that he would have liked his delegation to include more women. He stated that in future, steps will be taken with the political parties to ensure that at least one woman parliamentarian participates in his visits, without affecting the independence of the process.

Participants then explored possible opportunities for cooperation between the two parliaments, in particular the [Parliamentary Officers' Study Program](#) (POSP). To support the reforms proposed by Prime Minister designate Hariri, the Canadian delegates also highlighted Canada's expertise in relevant areas such as energy, waste management and telecommunications. The Prime Minister designate suggested a visit to Canada to continue these discussions and to explore opportunities for cooperation. He concluded by saying that he believes that the private sector and the business world have a big role to play in shaping Lebanon's future.

Meeting with His Excellency Nabih Berri, Speaker of the National Assembly

The Speaker of the National Assembly welcomed the members of the delegation at his office in Ain el-Tineh. The participants first discussed the large Lebanese diaspora in Canada. They then talked about the similarities and differences between their respective legislative bodies regarding the responsibilities of the speakers. On that point, they discussed institutional security, protection for members of parliament, administration and finances, and the research services available to members.

The refugee issue was then addressed. In Speaker Berri's view, the return of the Syrian refugees is crucial, and he suggested that it should be initiated as soon as conditions are safe. He explained that Lebanon cannot support this influx of refugees, because the impact on the economy, education and health care in Lebanon is considerable under the present economic circumstances. In addition, given that society and political parties are segmented based on religious denominations, in his view accepting more refugees would risk destabilizing the delicate balance achieved in Lebanon. In the absence of a government, Speaker Berri said that he believes that the current administration would be able to support the country for some time. Everyone hoped that a new government will be formed quickly, and that measures will be taken to put public finances back in order.

Speaker Regan explained that Canada also supports the safe return of the refugees, and he added that their return must also be voluntary. Everyone agreed that the refugee situation is an international issue. The participants expressed a desire to form even closer

ties between the two parliaments and suggested that this be achieved through parliamentary friendship groups.

Meeting with His Excellency Elie Ferzli, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly

Speaker Regan spoke about the important contribution made by the Lebanese community in Canada. The discussions then dealt with the close ties that Deputy Speaker Ferzli maintains with the Lebanese-Canadian community, particularly its Muslim members. The Deputy Speaker said that he firmly believes in the harmonious coexistence of the West with the Arab world, and that is why he is in favour of President Aoun's intercultural dialogue project. He went on to say that Lebanon must be supported and remain a united country. Speaker Regan said that Canada sees diversity as a source of enrichment, and that he also hopes for a prosperous Lebanon.

Deputy Speaker Ferzli, stated that he thinks the high number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their demographic weight risk destabilizing the country, which is already beset by economic and political difficulties. He also talked about the widespread concern in Lebanese society that these refugees will settle permanently in Lebanon. He therefore voiced his support for a prompt return of Syrian refugees.

The participants then addressed the categories of humanitarian and political refugees. In the first case, the refugees could consider returning if their environment is stable and safe, and the infrastructure is adequate. It was expressed that in the second case, it may be more difficult for them to consider returning, even if physical conditions are suitable, for fear of being persecuted by the current regime. Nonetheless, everyone agreed that the refugees' impact on Lebanon is enormous and that fundamentalism must be addressed. Mr. Ferzli added that action is urgently needed because social problems in the communities and the temporary camps are growing.

During this meeting, the participants briefly discussed parliamentary procedure and the Deputy Speaker expressed a keen interest in territorial consensus governments like those of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.

Meeting with Mr. Alain Aoun, Secretary of the National Assembly, and Mr. Assad Dergham, M.P.

Members of Parliament Alain Aoun and Assad Dergham thanked Canada for supporting Lebanon through [Canada's Middle East Strategy](#). They then addressed the barriers to forming the government, the negative impact of the massive influx of refugees into Lebanon, and the need to initiate structural reforms to permit investment and stimulate economic growth.

Mr. Aoun indicated that he would like international funds to be invested in Syria to facilitate refugees' return to their country, rather than being used to improve living conditions for refugees in Lebanon. He continued to say that he believes that most of the refugees could return to Syria immediately, unless they are in Lebanon for political reasons. Mr. Aoun suggested that the international community intervene with the Syrian regime and demand guarantees of safety. He noted that Lebanon's major challenge is having to support this massive influx of refugees while facing a serious economic crisis and being unable to see a political solution to the Syrian conflict, and thus a return of the Syrians to their country.

The Canadian delegates then asked whether an extraordinary session could be convened if there were further delays in forming a government. Mr. Aoun said that Speaker Berri was examining that possibility, but he is confident in the ability of Prime Minister designate Hariri to form a new government in the very near future. He underlined that it was urgent to implement structural reforms in Lebanon and obtain the investments and contributions promised at the CEDRE conference. He added that it is essential to economic recovery that the investment plan presented in April 2018 be implemented as soon as possible.

Meeting with Mr. Adnan Daher, Secretary-General of the National Assembly

Several topics were addressed during this meeting, including parliamentary procedure, the legislative process, the administration of the assembly, the parliamentary calendar, question periods, appearances by ministers, broadcasting, and the composition and role of parliamentary committees. Given Lebanon's economic situation, the delegation asked whether it was possible to legislate the reforms needed to obtain the funds promised at the CEDRE conference. The Secretary-General said that, in theory, members could submit bills in the absence of a cabinet. In order to be possible, a session would have to be convened.

The participants then discussed the possibility that a senior Lebanese official could participate in the POSP in Ottawa in the near future. The registration procedure and participant selection were then explained. The Secretary-General expressed interest and said he would consider this possibility.

Meeting with General Adnan El Sheik Ali, Director of the Security of the National Assembly

General El Sheik Ali welcomed the delegation and invited them to tour Parliament with him. At the end of the visit, the group discussed corporate security. Speaker Regan explained that security procedures and lines of authority in the parliamentary precinct had been revised following the attacks in October 2014. There was also discussion of managing the parliamentary precinct during demonstrations and personal protection of members. On that point, the General explained that the national police and security force in Lebanon was called the Internal Security Forces (ISF). Within that organization, he explained that there is a branch specifically responsible for parliamentarians, and he said that state police officers from the ISF are assigned to each parliamentarian to ensure their safety.

Other activities – Lebanon

The delegation visited the Qob Elias Primary Care Centre in the Bekaa Valley, where they met directors and patients, as well as representatives of *Médecins du Monde* and the Islamic Welfare Society. Supported by the Lebanese government and multilateral organizations, the primary care centres were created to provide affordable health care and medication to refugees and vulnerable members of the Lebanese population, without discrimination. Staff mentioned that the Qob Elias Primary Care Centre sees over 2,000 patients a month, and there are nearly 1,000 primary care centres in Lebanon.

This on-site visit was an opportunity for the delegates to better understand the challenges faced by Syrian refugees and the Lebanese host community. It also allowed the

delegation to learn more about Canadian aid to Lebanon to deal with the Syrian refugee crisis.

The delegation travelled to an informal tented settlement nearby, where they were met by representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). During the site visit, the delegates observed one of the humanitarian programs that addresses health, education, housing and sanitation, funded by Canada through *Médecins du Monde*, UNICEF and the UNHCR. To conclude the visit, the delegation spoke with two Syrian refugee families to see how the aid received at the camp helps them and to better understand the challenges these families face. These meetings were also a chance to discuss what is preventing them from returning to Syria and to learn about their intention to return there eventually.

The delegates also discussed the opportunities and challenges involved in governance and accountability with a group of ambassadors to Lebanon. In addition to helping participants better understand the current political and security situation in Lebanon, the discussion gave them an opportunity to discuss the priorities and programs of donor countries in Lebanon.

In order to discuss good public governance, transparency and inclusive parliaments, the delegation also met the following civil society actors:

- Mr. Gassan Moukheiber, former parliamentarian;
- Mr. Sami Atallah, Executive Director of the Lebanese Centre for Political Studies (LCPS);
- Mr. George Ghali, Director of ALEF;
- Ms. Layal Bahnam, manager of the MAHARAT Foundation program;
- Mr. Badri El Meouchi, President of the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA);
- Ms. Joumana Haddad, Lebanese author, speaker, journalist, and women's rights activist;
- Ms. Yara Nassar, Secretary General of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE); and
- Ms. Nermine Sibai, lawyer and legal researcher in the field of human rights and public freedoms.

The round table offered a better understanding of how the Lebanese Parliament functions and interacts with civil society. It also shed light on current challenges regarding transparency and corruption in Lebanon and other areas where improvements are required.

Background – Jordan

Canada recognizes the stabilizing role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (Jordan) in the Middle East. It is an important partner for Canada, as demonstrated by humanitarian, diplomatic and development support given to that country. In addition to working together in a host of multilateral organizations, Canada and Jordan share the objective of finding lasting solutions to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq and to the Israel-Palestine peace process. The two countries also have close interpersonal ties through an established Jordanian-Canadian community in Canada, including students, and Canadians living and

working in Jordan. According to the 2016 Census, 14,250 individuals of Jordanian origin live in Canada.

To help mitigate the impact of the Syrian crisis in Jordan, Canada has increased its bilateral development assistance seven-fold in the past five years, raising it from \$8 million per year in 2012–13 to \$69 million per year in 2017–18. Because more than half of the bilateral development aid that Canada provides to Jordan focuses on education, Canada's commitment is aimed at reinforcing long-term objectives by supporting inclusive education, strengthening capacity in municipal service delivery, and helping to generate sustainable economic development, with a special focus on increasing women's economic autonomy. Jordan received \$334 million through [Canada's Middle East Strategy](#) to meet the basic needs of refugees and host communities affected by the neighbouring conflicts.

The influx of millions of refugees is both a source of strength and weakness for the Jordanian economy. On the one hand, refugees put significant pressure on resources, particularly water, electricity, finances and social infrastructure, and they decrease the state's capacity to deliver services to the public. On the other hand, the influx of refugees adds wealth to certain segments of the population and benefits the real estate industry in many regions.

Syrian refugees comprise a skilled and hard-working labour force. Some have developed buying power and others are investing in the Jordanian economy. Following the [Jordan Compact](#), an agreement with donor countries, the Jordanian government has opened schools to Syrian refugees and offered 250,000 work permits to them. Apart from the approximately 2.2 million Palestinians who have emigrated from Israel and the West Bank, Jordan hosts over 1.3 million Syrian refugees, representing more than 10% of its population.

Economically, Jordan has few natural resources, a diminishing water supply and is largely centred on services and tourism. The conflicts in Iraq and Syria have resulted in a reduction in trade and investments in Jordan, through border closures and weakened export demand. Jordan is compelled to import 90% of its energy and is facing significant budget and trade deficits as well as a high public debt burden. It is heavily dependent on foreign transfers and is vulnerable to external fluctuations in oil prices. Jordan's debt, which was 80% of GDP in 2012, rose to 96% in 2017. Given this difficult economic situation, Jordan negotiated a \$700 million loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in exchange for fiscal and economic reforms. Under the IMF's austerity plan, the government must reduce its spending in order to reduce the growing debt of \$37 billion, representing 95% of gross domestic product. To date, the IMF's reforms have led to protests, in part due to a lack of communication by the government, fostering a sense that the real problem is corruption and a growing sense of economic inequality.

In political terms, Jordan is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy and power is divided among the executive, legislative and judicial branches, as well as among district and local governments. Since February 1999, the Jordanian head of state has been King Abdullah bin Hussein (King Abdullah II). The Parliament of Jordan is bicameral, and under its Constitution, the monarch must approve all laws; however, that veto may be cancelled out by a majority vote of two thirds of the upper chamber (*Majlis Al-Aayan*) and the lower

chamber (*Majlis Al-Nuwaab*). The Prime Minister nominates the cabinet, and the ministers are then appointed by the King.

The present head of government is Prime Minister Omar al-Razzaz, a former senior official at the World Bank and former Minister of Education. Prime Minister al-Razzaz was appointed by the King and approved by the lower chamber on June 5, 2018. He succeeds Prime Minister Hani Al-Mulki, who resigned after becoming extremely unpopular following the implementation of the 2018 budget. Over 30 protests, sit-ins and strikes occurred between January and June of 2018 in response to the proposed budget austerity measures. The government of Prime Minister Omar al-Razzaz is now struggling to find a middle ground between upholding its commitments to the IMF and satisfying a disillusioned public. The most recent election was held on September 20, 2016 and the next election is scheduled for 2020.

During the delegation's visit, Prime Minister al-Razzaz carried out a cabinet shuffle and reduced his cabinet from 29 to 27, in an apparent attempt to calm widespread discontent with growing economic problems.

Objectives – Jordan

While the objectives of the visit to Jordan were similar to those of the Lebanon portion, the economic, social and political conditions were different. First, this visit gave the delegates an opportunity to discuss ways of strengthening public confidence with their Jordanian counterparts through electoral reforms to promote accountability and transparency. Second, the delegates also discussed best practices for encouraging participation by civil society and good governance, and talked about their importance for political stability, particularly in times of economic austerity. Third, they discussed the regional situation with Jordanian authorities, including the impact of Syrian refugees, who have received over \$334 million from Canada under the Middle East Strategy. And fourth, the ultimate goal of this visit was to strengthen ties between Canada and Jordan and explore various opportunities for collaboration between the two countries.

Meetings – Jordan

During their time in Amman, Jordan, the members of the delegation met with the following people:

- His Excellency Omar al-Razzaz, Prime Minister;
- His Excellency Faisal Al-Fayez, President of the Senate;
- His Excellency Atef Tarawneh, Speaker of the House of Representatives; and
- His Excellency Khamees Ateyyeh, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Meeting with His Excellency Omar al-Razzaz, Prime Minister

Prime Minister al-Razzaz received the members of the delegation in his office. Speaker Regan underlined Jordan's important role in the region. He also congratulated the Prime Minister on the openness and welcome that Jordan has shown Syrian refugees.

The Prime Minister thanked Speaker Regan and then described how at the beginning of his term, the Jordanian public encouraged him to open the borders to over 400,000 Syrians, even though it could mean risks and inconveniences. He concluded by saying

that Jordanians share common values with Canadians – both peoples believe in justice and in helping others who are in need – and Speaker Regan concurred.

A delegate reiterated Canada's support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA's goal is to meet the basic needs of Palestinian refugees in the areas of health, education, humanitarian aid, and social services.

The discussion then turned to Jordan's progress in becoming a democracy, and the improvements that are still needed in such areas as the representativeness of political parties and the opposition's role in holding the government to account. Prime Minister al-Razzaz explained that the road to democracy was not easy, but that King Abdullah II was firmly committed to making Jordan an Arab democracy. On that point, the Prime Minister said that Canada was an example for his country, given its values of tolerance and pluralism.

Speaker Regan suggested that senior parliamentary officials should come to Canada to participate in the POSP and to learn more about best practices. Other ideas for cooperation, include internships and student exchanges. The Prime Minister explained that the Jordanian education system promotes diversity by actively encouraging civil debate and requiring volunteer work, student internships, and academic activities. He concluded by inviting the delegates to return to Jordan for a longer visit.

Meeting with His Excellency Faisal Al-Fayez, President of the Senate

The President of the Senate, together with several senators, first spoke about Jordan's excellent relations with Canada. He said that this relationship had intensified in recent years, citing the recent high-level visits by King Abdullah II, the Crown Prince, senior officials, and business leaders. President Al-Fayez also thanked Canada for its aid to Jordan, as the country took in millions of refugees. He explained that the huge waves of refugees had not only affected the government's capacity to deliver services and provide infrastructure, but also temporarily impacted the country's security. He noted that he would like to strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries, particularly in connection with education and trade. On that point, he hoped to expand the Free Trade Agreement in place between Jordan and Canada since 2009. President Al-Fayez pointed out that the recent reopening of the border between Jordan and Iraq, allowing the movement of persons and goods, was an encouraging sign for the economic recovery.

During the discussion, the participants identified several values and interests that unite Canadians and Jordanians: honesty, justice, conciliation, diversity and pacifism. The hosts stated that Canada and Jordan are both "security-producing countries" and "peace-loving nations".

Speaker Regan and the other delegates said that Jordan is more than an important partner for Canada, and that it is, in fact, a friend in the region. They said that Canada has a deep respect for Jordan, who has welcomed refugees with open arms even though it has few resources. On the question of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they specified that Canada, like Jordan, supports the two-state solution and they noted Canada's increased contribution to UNRWA. The delegates also suggested increasing student and business exchanges and discussed the POSP as a program in which senior Jordanian officials

could participate. They also discussed possible initiatives to increase cooperation between the two countries, particularly among young people. The meeting concluded with the Canadian delegates congratulating Jordan on its firm commitment to becoming a parliamentary democracy.

Meeting with His Excellency Atef Tarawneh, Speaker of the House of Representatives

After being warmly welcomed by Speaker Tarawneh and his colleagues, the delegates attended a meeting at which several members of Parliament were present, including the Deputy Speakers of the House of Representatives, and members of the Jordan-Canada parliamentary friendship group and the foreign affairs committee. In their opening remarks, the Jordanian parliamentarians discussed the good relations between Canada and Jordan and the impact of successive waves of refugees on Jordan. They stressed the desire of King Abdullah II to find a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine that would be lasting and peaceful. On the Syrian conflict, they said that a political solution must be given priority. They thanked Canada for supporting Jordan through the UNRWA program and its Middle East Strategy, and said they believe the refugee problem is an international issue. They also reaffirmed their desire to work more closely with Canada, to strengthen the free trade agreement in place between the two countries, and to expand cooperation in the areas of agriculture, education, communication and tourism. They concluded by saying that the two countries share noble values and an interest in humanitarian aid.

Speaker Regan said that Canada and Jordan have had a long and valuable friendship that he would like to strengthen in the years to come. He also expressed his admiration for the hospitality that Jordanians have offered to Syrian refugees, when they themselves have very few resources. He added that Jordan is key to peace in the region and internationally, hence Canada's important financial support in several areas, including education. The Canadian delegates expressed that they would also like to expand trade between the two countries and hope to see Jordan prosper. They reaffirmed that, like Jordan, Canada supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and believes that the refugee issue is the responsibility of the international community. They concluded by saying they would like to eventually return to Jordan.

At the end of the meeting, the chair of the Jordan-Canada parliamentary friendship group said that he hopes to initiate efforts with Canadian parliamentarians to increase cooperation between the two countries in the areas of science and medicine as well as education and training.

Meeting with His Excellency Khamees Ateyyeh, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives

Mr. Khamees Ateyyeh, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Secretary-General Firas Adwan met the delegates on their arrival and also before their departure. During those meetings, the close ties between Jordan and Canada were noted and the desire to strengthen the relationship was also affirmed. Various options for cooperation between the two countries, including the POSP, were also discussed. The Canadian delegates thanked their hosts for their outstanding hospitality, and the Deputy Speaker mentioned his upcoming visit to Canada.

Other activities – Jordan

The delegates spoke with staff at the Canadian Embassy about the objectives of their visit and were able to answer employees' questions. The delegates then met a family of Syrian refugees who were to soon be settled in Canada. They gained an understanding of the family's experiences and expectations, and the support program available to them for resettlement.

In the summer of 2017, Jordan implemented a policy of decentralization with simultaneous elections at three levels: local, municipal and provincial. Given that the first two levels of government now had a quota for women and that the decentralization was carried out rapidly, the Embassy of Canada in Jordan offered training to support these women and help them to take on their new responsibilities. To familiarize themselves with the program, the delegates met with the women who had been elected at the municipal and governorate levels:

- Ms. Manar Abu-Rumman, Balqa Governorate Council;
- Ms. Raya Al-Kouz, Amman Municipal Council;
- Ms. Afaf Nethami, Jerash Municipal Council; and
- Ms. Asma Al-E'Thamat, Mafrq Governorate Council.

These elected representatives described the barriers that female politicians face which underlined their extraordinary accomplishments. The meeting was also useful for highlighting the progress achieved and the improvements still required in areas such as accountability. It became apparent that these women succeeded due to several factors, including the excellent overall reputation of women in Jordanian society (as being honest and trustworthy) and the support of the people close to them (tribe, close family, etc.). The Embassy's training program was also identified as one of the factors contributing to their success.

Speaker Regan and the members also discussed the role of political parties, the relationship between Jordanian parliamentarians and the electorate, the positive reforms achieved, and the areas where improvements are still needed. As part of these discussions, the delegation met with:

- Ms. Sara Habachi, Senior Programme Manager, Westminster Foundation for Democracy;
- Mr. Khalid Ali, Regional Head – Middle East and North Africa, Global Partners Governance;
- Mr. Richard Chambers, Team Leader, Jordan Office, United Nations Development Program; and
- Mr. Arianit Shehu, Senior Country Director, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

This was an excellent opportunity for the delegates to learn more about the status of democracy in Jordan. The delegates also had the opportunity to broaden their knowledge by engaging with a group of ambassadors to Jordan. In addition to giving them a different perspective on matters, the meeting enabled them to discuss the domestic situation in Jordan and the impact of regional conflicts, including the Syrian conflict, on the country.

The delegation also learned more about Jordan's culture and history by visiting the Roman ruins in Amman.

Acknowledgements

The delegation would like to thank the staff of GAC, the Library of Parliament, and the Canadian embassies in Lebanon and Jordan for their support, their professionalism, and their assistance in preparing this visit. Special thanks also go to Ambassador Emmanuelle Lamoureux and Ambassador Peter MacDougall for their support during these visits.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Geoff Regan, P.C., M.P.,
Speaker of the House of Commons

Travel Costs

Visit by the Honourable Geoff Regan, P.C., M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons,
and a parliamentary delegation to Lebanon and Jordan

TRAVEL	\$54,625.71
ACCOMMODATION	\$6,404.89
PER DIEMS	\$2,715.47
PROTOCOL	\$1,783.94
MISCELLANEOUS	\$1,073.52
TOTAL	\$66,603.53