



## **Position paper 2003**

**Submitted to Canadian government officials and policy makers in October 2003**

## **Position paper –2003-**

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## **SUMMARY**

A position paper by Rassemblement Canadien pour le Liban (RCPL), a Canadian nonprofit organization promoting Canadian humanitarian and democratic values in Lebanon and the Middle East. This paper, addressed to the government that will be elected in 2004, tackles Canada's role in the global geo-political scene, and suggests strategies to improve its profile, role and contribution.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the past 60 years, Canada has taken leading roles in the global scene. These roles were highly influenced by Canadian values that emphasize peace, security and prosperity through the respect of human rights and strong democratic institutions. Such roles included our involvement in World War II, the Korean War and the creation of Blue Helmet peacekeepers.

In the 1990s, Canada has taken a lower profile role in order to promote a trade agenda that requires developing stronger ties with other countries. Some of the countries are ruled by authoritarian dictatorships that abuse the values that Canadians consider dear to their heart.

## **2. CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

As elections are getting closer, Canadians expect their new leader to restore Canada's leadership on the global scene. This will be achieved by taking bold positions in public, rather than increasing military expenditures for peace missions. Canada is not a major military power; it needs a realistic strategy to maintain a global profile and retain its status in leading international bodies such as the G8 and NATO. The challenge we face is how to devise such a strategy.

## **3. FIGHTING TERRORISM THE CANADIAN WAY**

Canada has the potential of contributing to the global war on terrorism by promoting a different avenue than military intervention. Canada is not a military power bent on conquest, nor do Canadians believe in military interventions in fighting terrorism with the exception of extreme cases. Canadians trust in the power of peaceful measures to fight terrorism such as promoting good governance and sustainable development in Middle Eastern countries. This can only be achieved by promoting human rights, democracy, trade and education.

## **4. A REALISTIC PILOT COUNTRY: LEBANON**

The Canadian strategy must start with a realistic pilot country. Such a country must be small so that the Canadian led initiative is intensive enough to produce results. The country must also have strong forces of liberalism that desire democratic changes, and an educated population to appreciate reforms. Only one country in the Middle East meets these criteria: Lebanon.

## **5. LEBANON'S CURRENT SITUATION, AND CANADA'S POSITION**

Lebanon, a country of 3.7 million inhabitants, is currently suffering from an economic meltdown because of rampant corruption and financial mismanagement. These factors are worsening as the Syrian occupation turns Lebanon into a proxy state. Canada maintains that Lebanon is currently a sovereign country that has well recovered from the 1975-1990 civil war.

This is belied by the facts. Lebanon, once ranked as the most democratic country in the Middle East, is now on par with Syria and Egypt [2]. The anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International has described Lebanon as the worst case of chronic graft in the Middle East and North Africa [3].

## **6. CANADA HAS NOTHING TO LOSE**

Considering that Lebanon and Syria have minimal trade with Canada, a bold position on the Lebanese situation does not carry high costs for Canada. Instead, our current policies are potentially more costly, as lack of support for democratic reform in Lebanon could turn the country into a dangerous powder keg instead of a viable model of Democratization in the Middle East.

Over 200,000 Canadians are of Lebanese origin; a vibrant community of 50,000 Canadians resides in Lebanon. This gives us potential to pursue successful nation building.

## **7. CANADA CAN BE A LEADER IN PROMOTING UN RESOLUTIONS**

Opinion polls in the months preceding the invasion of Iraq by the United States clearly demonstrated that the majority of Canadians disapproved of military intervention without the approval of the United Nations. Meanwhile, there remain several resolutions from the UN Security Council pending, and they are receiving little attention. These include resolution 520, which calls for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Lebanon.

Canada should advocate the implementation of all UN Security Council resolutions for the sake of international stability and security. If international law and multilateral mechanisms are not respected, then the global community will lose cohesion, and can lead to isolationism and wars.

## **8. WHY PRESS FOR CHANGE IN LEBANON**

Canada's policy towards Lebanon has been short sighted and should be reconsidered for 3 fundamental reasons:

1. **Security:** In spite of provisions for their disarmament and demobilization, some of Lebanon's wartime militias, protected by the Syrian military occupation, have not been disarmed and can cause a major Middle Eastern flare up with Israel.
2. **Democratization:** Prior to the war, Lebanon was a liberal and pluralistic country with democratic institutions. A founding member of the United Nations and of the Arab League, Lebanon must once again become a model for neighboring countries; it must not be allowed to join the ranks of authoritarian regimes. Given its size, socio-demographic attributes and values, it has potential for reform.
3. **Resources:** Lebanon has well educated workforce with a developed financial services sector, which is a key element to establishing free-trade and democratic reforms.

## **9. CANADA CAN CONTRIBUTE ITS EXPERTISE**

Canada can help Lebanon in a number of important ways:

1. Denouncing all forms of human rights abuses in Lebanon, including the oppression against the freedom of opinion and expression.
2. Requesting a timetable for the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and the disarmament of all non-governmental groups.
3. Promoting nation building to help Lebanon recover from the war and rebuild civil society structures.
4. Provide anti-corruption programs and human rights education throughout the country in order to ensure humanitarian and democratic values are well ingrained in the society.
5. Provide capacity building for key public institutions like the judiciary and security forces.

## 10. REFERENCES

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