

## Visiting Bullock Chair Dr. Lloyd Axworthy reflects on his visit to Israel

During a recent two week stay at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and in various travels throughout Israel I had the opportunity to see the country with different eyes.

In previous incarnations my visits were short, all political or diplomatic and missing in the time to take in the rich experience offered by tapping into its cultural, scientific, economic, community life and in particular the depth and significance of Israel as a religious site to, three of the world's great faiths. It gave me a chance to better understand the roots of my own Christian belief and its intertwining with the Jewish and Muslim traditions

We know from constant media attention that these can be causes of conflict. But I also witnessed the common ground of our religions and the shared importance they have to so many around the world. One only has to visit the amazing archaeological exhibit at the Israel Museum sponsored by the Bronfman family of Canada to recognize that ancient history in all its phases points to a fundamental universalism, and how the politics of power of each and every era have masked that reality.

It also gave me pause to think on how at this juncture in time it is important for a serious, re-think of Canada's relations. So much of Canadian perceptions have been and are defined solely by the Israel-Palestine issue. And, while important it masks the potential for much more active engagement between Canada and Israel.

What's missed is the myriad of relationships of family, friends, business and, academe. What was increasingly clear is that these budding networks are the basis for building active engagement on innovative cooperation in sustainable practices between our respective universities, private businesses, foundations and civil environmental groups. This kind of cooperation can in turn pay political dividends in furthering the security issue for Israel, and offering Canada answers to our own water negligence in small and remote communities of the North constructive role

Water is the increasing currency of the world, becoming more vital than any other resource. Israel has world class water technology and know how .we have plenty of water but need to manage it better. It is already becoming an area of common Canadian /Israeli interest. But there is now a much broader agenda. Water or lack of it is becoming the driver for conflict, mass migration, the destruction of ecosystems. And an increasing number of the people escaping from North Africa, the Sahel region are forced to leave by the interminable drought that is spreading throughout the region.

At a meeting I attended in Oslo earlier this year a veteran Arab politician spoke of the need for regional collaboration to work on the water shortage issue one important way to reduce the pressure on migration is to come to grips with the water deficit. What was surprising in his comment was that any form of regional response around the Mediterranean basin must include Israel. His argument was that they have the proven technology. A follow observation was that the European Union got its start by focusing on common regional policies on coal and steel.

Would this be one very tangible way that Canada's stated purpose of international re-engagement could be manifest. Put our diplomacy, bridge building and development assistance to help as a third party in the formation of a water partnership that includes Israel as a valued

player, plant a foundation for regional cooperation and help in reducing the migrant pressure on the Mideast /Mediterranean region and in Europe.

This is the kind of global engagement that can involve, should involve Canadian business, our university and college sector and the work of Ngo's. It goes beyond the traditional government to government connections and opens the way for an inclusive network approach to our international role.

And, it would demonstrate that we can be a friend to Israel not just by words and rhetoric but through constructive action. It would demonstrate government action on a vital sustainability issue. And it would show a further commitment to meeting the refugee crisis. A multi- task foreign policy at work.

Lloyd Axworthy held the Bullock Chair at The Hebrew University at 2016.