

Dear Friend,

After years of drought in Israel, the rain came with gusto this season. Water levels in the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret) and aquifers across Israel have risen significantly and agriculture is flourishing. As spring warms us all, the hills are green and the flowers are blooming. There was even a record-setting butterfly migration across Israel in late-March, on their way to Cyprus and Western Europe. It is in the spirit of this awakening that I provide you with an update on our Embassy's work.

This is the fifth in our Ambassador Letter series and I hope that you take away a sense of the exciting results that our team has achieved since Rosh Hashanah, when I last wrote to you.

As you read this letter, Israelis will be going to the polls to elect their next government. There is electricity in the air here as we witness democracy in action. A record 41 political parties are on the ballot for Knesset seats!

These are also dynamic times for the Canada-Israel relationship. Governor General Julie Payette and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau have just hosted Israeli President Reuven Rivlin for a State visit in Ottawa and Toronto. The visit was reciprocating the State visit to Israel of our former Governor General David Johnston in 2016. Canada was deeply honoured to welcome President Rivlin. In his luncheon with Prime Minister Trudeau, President Rivlin's speech declared: "Prime Minister, I want to thank you not only for your friendship, but for your moral leadership. The mark of a true leader is his willingness to take a clear moral stand. Your moral stance against anti-Semitism in all its forms, the strong support for Israel in the UN, the annual UNGA resolution on the human rights situation in Iran are just some examples of your moral leadership." For his part, Prime Minister Trudeau stated "we are ready to write the next chapter in the story of our friendship." Throughout his visit, President Rivlin and his impressive delegation of Israeli business delegates engaged with Canadians to do just that, building and expanding ties among business, youth and the community – in addition to deepening his personal connection with Prime Minister Trudeau.

Last fall, our Embassy welcomed the successful visits to Israel of Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland and Minister of International Trade Diversification Jim Carr. Minister Freeland spent two hours meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu and delivered a well-received speech to a full house with the Israel Council on Foreign Relations. Minister Carr highlighted new opportunities with the modernized Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement and raised Canada's profile among the Israeli innovation community, including at the DLD Tel Aviv Innovation Festival.

As Canada and Israel celebrate 70 years of diplomatic relations in 2019, these visits mark our ever expanding and evolving relations with Israel. Over the past months, the Embassy has delivered trade and innovation missions from British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick, building opportunities in areas such as life sciences and digital health, agri-tech and cyber security. Much of our work also focuses on advocating for individual Canadian companies as they advance their objectives in Israel. For example, in February I was pleased to join the CEO of OpenText, one of Canada's largest technology firms, as he launched a strategic partnership in Israel.

Of course, innovation continues to be a key driver of Canadian engagement with Israel. In October, Canada hosted the first meeting of the Canada-Israel Bilateral Dialogue for science, technology and innovation, bringing together Canadian and Israeli stakeholders from across governments and the research community to identify new areas for collaboration. This was augmented by a visit of ten university vice-presidents of research supported by the U15 and CIJA, as well as a visit of Canada's Chief Information

Officer for a Digital Government Summit. We also welcomed and enjoyed time with the CIJA Board of Directors as well as the many CIJA-supported missions, including a CIJA mission of five Canadian Senators representing Ontario and the Atlantic Provinces.

During this past winter, the Embassy had the pleasure of welcoming HMCS Ville de Québec and her crew in Haifa's port. The ship visit coincided with the visits of Vice-Admiral Ron Lloyd, Commander of the Royal Canadian Navy, and the Commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force Lieutenant-General Al Meinzinger. We hosted a wonderful reception aboard this most impressive ship with its brand new Cyclone helicopter, which included several great interviews with Israeli journalists and a lovely ceremony honouring Morris Lobe, a Canadian-Israeli veteran of both World War 2 and the Arab-Israeli War of 1948.

Of course, facilitating visits is only a part of our work here. Our diplomats are also devoted to analyzing and reporting to Ottawa on the developing situations in Israel and the region. Since the fall, the security situation in Israel has continued to be quite tense. Civilians here have been the target of rocket attacks from Gaza, with several long-range rockets launched by Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad toward Tel Aviv and the centre of Israel. In the north, the IDF uncovered and closed off six Hezbollah tunnels leading into Israeli territory. The Government of Canada has condemned these attacks and tunnels in official statements by Minister Freeland, Canadian speeches at the United Nations and in our social media communications. We support the diplomatic work of the United Nations and of Egypt and other partner countries to avoid another round of conflict with either Hamas or Hezbollah.

Our immigration and consular sections have remained very busy serving Canadians in Israel and Israelis seeking to visit, study or work in Canada. In 2018, we resettled 1,100 privately sponsored refugees from the African asylum seeker community in Israel to Canada and we are on track to do the same in 2019. Canada and Canadians are providing private sponsorship for these vulnerable people in the absence of a decision by the Government of Israel to settle them in Israel. Our passport issuing office is one of the busiest in our network and we have almost doubled the amount of citizenship applications processed, ranking us 11th overall for Canadian diplomatic offices around the world – an amazing statistic for a country with only 9 million citizens, and indicative of the deep, truly personal connections uniting our two countries.

Our Embassy has also been tireless in promoting Canada through cultural diplomacy. There is a deep, almost unquenchable thirst for the arts in Israel and the Public Affairs team has been busy keeping Canada on the billboards here. We worked with the Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance in Tel Aviv to create the first-ever Canadian dance festival in Israel, CanaDanse. For one week in January, three Canadian dance companies that had never before performed here enthralled Israeli audiences with their talent and diversity of styles. Beyond this, to cite just a few examples, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal performed at the Israel Opera for three nights; we supported the first ever women's rights film festival in Jerusalem; and we celebrated the publication of another Canadian-Israeli author's book, "At Home: Talks with Canadian Artists about Place and Practice."

We look forward to another exciting spring and summer season, during which time we hope to see many of you here in Israel. I truly value all of your contributions to the Canada-Israel relationship and to our work here.

I wish you and your families a peaceful and relaxing Passover and Easter Holiday. Chag Sameah!

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Deborah Lyons".

Ambassador
Embassy of Canada in Israel