

Remarks at the Welcoming Reception for the

***Stocktaking Conference on
Palestinian Refugee Research***

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Good evening, everybody. Welcome to the International Development Research Centre, and welcome to Ottawa to those of you who have travelled to be with us. We are not sure whether summer has finally arrived, so we make no guarantees about the weather! But we are delighted to have you here with us.

My name is Maureen O'Neil and I am the President of the International Development Research Centre – IDRC. We are proud to be hosting the second Stocktaking Conference on Palestinian Refugee Research.

For those of you who are attending the conference, I shall be making some short introductory remarks tomorrow morning, so I shall be very brief now. We have a very full agenda over the next few days, so we wanted to have a reception to welcome you before we start our work together. I know that some participants will not arrive until tomorrow, but I am happy to see many of you here now.

It is wonderful that so many of you have travelled far to be with us. I know that, for some of you, getting the paper work and tickets and visa has been a complicated business, so thank you for making such an effort to get here. Thanks also to our friends from DFAIT – the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade – who have helped immensely to get the

necessary permits and visas. Special thanks in their case are due to the Canadian embassy in Tel Aviv and to the Canadian Representative Office in Ramallah, who have spared no effort.

Thanks also to our colleagues from Citizenship and Immigration Canada who have worked so hard to issue the necessary visas.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the help of the Canadian International Development Agency – CIDA – who fund the IDRC program that is organizing this conference.

(Possible mention of some who may be in attendance: John McNee, Assistant Deputy Minister; Mike Molloy, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; Jill Sinclair; Mario Renaud.)

With the increasing problems of international travel – cancelled flights, scares about SARS, and so on – when I asked my staff last week, “How many people are really going to make it here?” — they promised me that they would give me the answer half way through the conference!

Please let IDRC staff know if there is anything they can do to help your stay. I believe that you have been given some tourist information in the material provided to you, so I hope that you will have an opportunity to visit a little of our beautiful city. Those of you to whom we owe money will, I hope, have discovered that it is here waiting for you!

I hope that I will meet you all over the next few days. It is a pleasure to have you here. I wish you a pleasant stay, and a productive meeting!