

Speech by HE Dr. Abubaker Alqirbi  
On the Occasion of His Visit to Canada  
Reception & Press Conference  
The Chateau Laurier Hotel  
January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Honourable Speaker Milliken, Excellencies, Parliamentarians, Members of Government, Ambassadors and Friends, good afternoon,

I am glad to be in Ottawa. I feel at home here, but I miss the sun of Sana'a!

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today. It is also a great personal honour to be the first Yemeni Foreign Minister to visit Canada and I wish to convey my greatest appreciation to the people and the Government of Canada for their warm hospitality and the quality of the reception I have received.

Yemen has always viewed this country as a good friend and partner; actually it is Yemen's number one economic partner, when we consider the investment of the Nexen Company which is exemplary, really, in the field of investors in the oil industry. It has not only invested to explore for oil, but also to care for Yemen and the Yemenis and I would like to ask you to give them a clap for their contributions to Yemen.

We have known for many years that Canada deserves its world-renowned reputation for its flawless commitment to the principles of democracy, tolerance, and liberty, but we also know that it is in times of adversity that one's greatest qualities surface – those of compassion and generosity of spirit, as demonstrated today to the people of Haiti.

Indeed, Canada has been among the first to provide humanitarian assistance to many countries in the world, not to Yemen though. This overwhelming Haitian tragedy has touched the hearts of all of us, even in places as remote as Yemen, so, our profound condolences for the loss of life which, sadly, includes some Canadian Citizens. Our hearts are with their families and with the people of Canada in Haiti.

In the last two years we have also been the very grateful recipients of Canadian disaster relief, after we experienced catastrophic flooding, resulting in enormous human suffering and collapse of infrastructure in one of our Provinces.

Since Christmas Day, Yemen has unexpectedly been propelled to the centre of media attention. My intention here today is, in part, to clarify some of the issues; offer some perspective and put forward a plan by which we can achieve some solid and lasting solutions. It is our sincere wish that Canada will be a partner in accomplishing these objectives.

The issue of security has been the focus of the media but it is not new to Yemen. There has been a jihadist presence in Yemen for the last twenty years, ever since the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Consequently, as the economic situation in Yemen has deteriorated, the jihadists have taken advantage of it and increased their extremist activities within the country.

While media reports paint a gloomy picture, in fact there is still tremendous progress and increasing interest in Yemen. Nexen Inc of Calgary, well-known as Yemen's greatest corporate partner, continues to prosper, as well as Alberta's Calvalley Company and many others involved in oil and gas industry. The French giant Total has just completed an investment of over \$4 billion for production of natural gas, which is now on line. This world class gas project by LNG Yemen, with major international partnerships, has the capacity to produce between \$30 - \$50 billion dollars worth of revenues over the next 20 years.

Despite the present difficult conditions in Yemen, we have also put a lot of effort into various reforms - economic, social and political, in order to create the right atmosphere for investment in not only oil and gas but also beyond that - for mineral resources, the fishing industry and tourism – I think that Yemen is one of the most promising countries for tourism in the world. This is why we feel that Canadian partnership and a Canadian presence in Yemen will assist in increasing the relationship between our countries and will establish a wider potential for business affiliation between us.

There is no doubt that Yemen needs significant assistance from the international community. In order to address internal domestic issues of poverty, unemployment and economic stagnation, the way to that is by resolving the many existing political conflicts in the country. President Saleh has made a clear commitment that the solutions to all of these will be a political one and this is why he has called for a National Dialogue which will involve all political parties in the country; non-governmental organizations and all groups of the population who have a vested interest in the stability and prosperity of Yemen. This Dialogue is going to be initiated on the 30<sup>th</sup> January of this month.

It is hoped that the London Conference will send the right message to Yemenis that the way out of their problems is through dialogue and not through violence.

The International Conference in London, which was called by HE, the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, we hope will be a landmark event and I am glad to see that Canada will be participating in this Conference. Having the participation of a country like Canada will ensure that the Conference addresses the real challenge facing Yemen, which is development. If we actually tackle the issues of development we will tackle most of the other difficulties and challenges. Challenges of radicalization; of extremism; of terrorism, whether we like it or not, take root in countries where there is lack of development. We know what has been advocated all along - that there is no development

without security, and that there is also no security without development. This is why we extend our hands to all our friends and our partners - Canada is among one of those countries to extend its hand with support and assistance to the people of Yemen, because the stability of Yemen is not only for the Yemenis, but it will reflect on the region as a whole. It will enable Yemen to do some of the good work, which is now unfortunately neglected, such as accepting refugees from the Horn of Africa – we have about 700,000 of these in Yemen, with all of the challenges that such refugees can create. I am sure that you have had your experience in Canada with this as well.

So I am glad that I am the first Yemeni Foreign Minister to come to Canada and I hope that it will initiate a new page in our relationship in which we cooperate, not only for the benefit of our two countries, but for our region and Yemen.

Thank you very much.