



## Opening Remarks: Civil Society Forum

**Bob Paquin**  
**Government of Canada**

- Excellencies, colleagues, honoured guests,
- I would like to convey Canada's thanks to Qatar's National Human Rights Committee, the Arab Democracy Foundation and the International Development Research Centre for their work in organizing this event.
- We are grateful for the diligent work which has gone into preparing this meeting, and their work throughout the past year.
- It is an honour for me to represent Canada in your distinguished company.
- Canada strongly reaffirms our commitment to supporting a partnership between the G8 and BMENA countries to share experiences and best practices on governance issues.
- Canada supports the goals of the G8-BMENA Initiative, and its role in providing a basis for improving consultation between participant governments and civil society.
- The key to the success of the Forum for the Future is to ensure that all participants, both governments and civil society, are full partners.
- Working with our Qatari colleagues, Canada has sought to revitalize the process this past year through a number of means. We would like to see the G8-BMENA Partnership retain its appeal to ministers as a unique platform for dialogue on reform between the G8 and governments of the region, but also and particularly with civil society.

- Co-Chairs have sought this year to further the evolution of this relationship by deepening the level of engagement in the run-up to the Forum.
  - We have made efforts to increase participation from governments in the civil society-led workshops, thereby increasing the dialogue even before the Forum.
  - Canada and Qatar have also changed the structure of the Forum itself to produce a more interactive session for the benefit of all participating.
  - As you will have seen in the agenda, Co-Chairs are proposing that the heart of the Forum be comprised of a panel session which we expect will lead to a more interactive dialogue between governments as well as with civil society and private sector representatives.
  - We ask that all participants come prepared to engage in a meaningful, respectful, and constructive dialogue.
  - In conclusion, Canada sees BMENA as an important forum for G8 cooperation with our partners from the broader Middle East and North Africa.
  - I am pleased to have this opportunity to share Canada's views with you, and I am looking forward to further exchanges with all of you as we prepare for the 7<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future.
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