

BY Joan Russow **PEJ News** - Amman, Jordan April 1 2013



After meeting with AbdullahII ibn Al-Hussein, King of Jordan, the Canadian Foreign Minister, John Baird held a press conference.

A reporter from the Jordan Times asked Minister John Baird if Canada was governed by a coalition government. Baird explained that there was not a tradition of coalition governments in Canada, and that the Harper Conservatives, with 38% of the national vote, had elected the majority of seats in Parliament, and now have a stable majority. The reporter asked a supplemental question for clarification because he thought that he had misunderstood Minister Baird. He asked: "How is it possible that you could have a majority government with only 38 % of the popular vote?" Baird was taken aback because he was not prepared for questions about Canada's quirky Westminster electoral system; he had come to discuss Syria and increase trade with Jordan

This response provoked a question from a reporter from AD-Dustour to ask about Canada's

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being under the rule of the Queen of England and about the role of the Governor General. Baird pointed out that the Governor General is appointed by the Prime Minister, with the approval of the Queen of England, and he or she has three roles: to summon Parliament; to dissolve or prorogue parliament; and to suspend members of Parliament for sufficient cause. Generally, he added, the Governor General, supports requests of the Prime Minister; rarely has the Governor General not acceded to a Prime Minister's requests. For example, in 2008, Prime Minister Harper had a minority government with 34% of seats in Parliament with the opposition holding 66% of the seats. Prime Minister Harper claimed that parliament had become dysfunctional because it was being slowed down with frivolous votes on motions by the opposition parties; the opposition parties, in a vote in Parliament, had even advocated strong measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and to fulfill the obligations under the Framework Convention on Climate Change, and its Protocol - the Kyoto Protocol. Prime Minister Harper explained that Canada's economy would collapse if Canada seriously addressed the issue of climate change. He pointed out that the oil sands would have to be closed down, pipelines, to not be built, and tankers not transferring Canadian oil to key foreign markets. Prime Minister Harper then stepped down, went to the Governor General, and requested the dissolution of Parliament. While under Canadian Protocol, the Governor General could have called on the opposition parties to form a coalition government, the Governor General decided, at Prime Minister's request, to allow for the dissolution of Parliament and for a General Election.

A reporter from [Efranews](#) followed up on the Kyoto Protocol, and asked about the issue of Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol, and thus Canada's failure to seriously address the issue of climate change and how, at the Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen, Canada had pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by only about 3% below 1990 level while the EU had agreed to 20% and was willing to go further to 30% if other developed states would follow.

A reporter from The Jordan Star, then raised the issue of Canada being the only country at the UN to withdraw from the Convention on Combatting Desertification – a major issue in parts of the Middle East; he then asked about the process in Canada vis-a-vis international agreements. Baird responded that it was not necessary for international issues to be brought to Parliament; under the Canadian Constitution the Prime Minister could determine whether to sign or ratify or withdraw from international instruments. Baird explained that, in Canada, in order to sign and ratify an international, covenant, convention, treaty, all that was required was consent by the Prime Minister and cabinet, which The Prime Minister appoints from the elected members in the Prime Minister's Party.

A reporter from [Petra-Jordanian News Agency](#) raised a concern about Canada's refusal to adopt the UN Declaration on a nuclear arms free Middle East. And about Canada's double standard in condoning Israel's possession of nuclear weapons while condemning Iran for possibly developing nuclear Weapons, Baird responded that Israel was a democracy whereas Iran was not.

An unidentified reporter suggested that Canada sounded more like an autocracy than a democracy

At this point Minister Baird indicated that the Press Conference was over.

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