

Canada and Africa: A New Partnership

Notes for keynote address by Minister Susan Whelan, Canadian Minister for International Cooperation, at the Nepad conference, Montreal.

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Excellencies, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin today by welcoming our African partners to Canada. One of my first international trips as Minister for International Cooperation was to Africa, where I visited a number of Canadian International Development Agency projects and met the people who work on them and some of the people who benefit from them. I have an idea of how long and how far you've travelled to be here today, and I thank you for making the journey.

I have a story for you, of another traveller, in another time and place. He came upon some people doing construction work in a town square. The traveller asked one worker, "What are you doing?"; and the man replied, "I'm shaping this stone to fit against that one." He asked the next worker the same question; and that man replied, "I'm building a cathedral." It's a good thing that somebody had a vision of what the goal of their labours was supposed to be.

We aren't likely to be building either cathedrals or pyramids or any structures of that nature in the course of our work in Africa; but our end is, in some ways, the same. We want to build a beautiful legacy for the generations to come. To get there, we need to have a vision of what we are building, and we need to take action on that vision. Vision and action together add up to the kind of leadership that will help to bring Africa out of poverty.

Everyone in this room has shown that they are dedicated to working for the benefit of Africa, and Africans. The fact that there are so many of you here today is inspiring. I welcome all of you to Montreal, and I welcome you to your forum. This event is an unprecedented, living manifestation of partnership. Most of you already work together as partners on important development issues in Africa. And we're all here to talk about a document that calls for a new kind of partnership, specifically, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, or NEPAD.

Here is a vision. The eradication of poverty in Africa. Equal rights and status for African women and men. Peace. Security. Democracy. Good governance. Active participation in the world economy. It's all in here.

Now we need to build awareness and foster constructive public discussion about this vision. Such discussion is an integral part of building and maintaining democracies, but it's also the foundation that makes ideas become reality and breathes life into documents to grow them into living plans of action. That said, this weekend is not the time for facile words or simple

shows of support. Let's take this opportunity, meeting face to face, to be frank with each other. There are some hard truths to be faced here.

Today, Africa is the only continent where poverty is rising. Almost half the population of Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 300 million people, lives on less than one dollar a day. Two-thirds of the people in the world living with HIV/AIDS live in the same region. A fifth of the population of Africa is affected by conflict. Life expectancy in Sub-Saharan Africa is only 47 years now; and it's declining. More than 200 million Africans lack access to health services, and more don't have access to safe drinking water.

Africa is the only region where the number of children out of school is rising. The complexity of the challenges facing the continent is staggering. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is not just a public health crisis - it is an economic and social crisis as families and communities are decimated, and the productive time of the healthy is claimed by the need to care for the sick. Health, education and all basic social services, where they exist, are threatened by this pandemic and the resulting social and economic costs; and the insufficiency of social services in turn fuels the crisis.

Generations of intolerance and oppression feed into cycles of political instability and conflict. And all of this both contributes to, and results from, poverty.

Canadian partners have a different set of problems to contend with at home. In Canada, Africa has to compete with a wide range of other pressing issues for time in the public mind - health care, the deficit, relations with the United States, terrorism, and so on. We also have to realize that public opinion polls show that there is a widespread perception here that Canadian assistance is going towards lining the pockets of corrupt leaders, instead of improving the lives of African people the way it was intended. Finally, we have to deal with the fact that Canadians like to see positive results; and we haven't been seeing a lot of them from Africa.

These are the challenges we are all facing. However overwhelming they may seem, though, I know we can overcome them together. I'm very excited to be a leader at this time. We are all involved right now, with creating a turning point in history. We have never before seen such favourable conditions for a renaissance in Africa. There seems to be a greater will now, than ever before, to come together to make good things happen.

At the end of the UN's Millennium Summit in 2000, Secretary General Kofi Annan said that he was "struck by the remarkable convergence of views on the challenge that faces us." The Millennium Development Goals were only made possible by this new consensus on how we want our world to be. These goals, agreed to by both donor and developing nations, set specific targets for eliminating extreme poverty and hunger, and achieving progress in the areas of health and education. In Monterrey, Mexico, at the UN Conference on Financing for Development in March, we saw a reaffirmation of both the importance of reaching the Millennium Development Goals, and a reaffirmation of the new development partnership that we believe will make those goals a reality.

We all have roles and responsibilities within this new partnership. From all

parties, the new partnership asks for a commitment to the long term. After fifty years, surely the best lesson learned is that the road to, and through, sustainable development is a long one; and those of us who are travelling it together have mutual responsibilities. Developing countries must take the lead in their own development, and create the conditions that will lead to sustainable development. Donor countries have a reciprocal responsibility to support them by fostering conditions that will assist developing countries in full participation in the world economy.

We must consider the net effects of all of our policies that have an impact on African and other developing countries, particularly trade and debt relief.

The NEPAD document is both a result of, and a contribution to, this major shift in global thinking about development. It's a concrete proposal on the table - one that is eloquently and tangibly articulated. It's a proposal that calls for a renewed partnership between African leaders and their people, among Africans, and between Africans and their global neighbours. It is a proposal that represents the vision of African leaders from the north, south, east and west. Through the NEPAD, and by acknowledging their foremost responsibility for Africa's development, African leaders are inviting the world to speak frankly to them. They have designed an agenda for the renewal of the continent based on African ownership and management, and cooperation within Africa. It is a home-made plan for Africa that recognizes that development assistance by itself will not build lasting prosperity.

I applaud the architects of the NEPAD, but they are unlikely to reach their goals without support. By support, I mean the cooperation of industrialized countries, of course. But of equal importance is cooperation from all levels of society in African countries - non-governmental organizations, institutions, businesses, and so forth. As the NEPAD document itself reads, "The New Partnership for Africa's Development will be successful only if it is owned by the African peoples united in their diversity."

For its part, the international community is ready to see things change. Canada, the United States, and the European Union all stepped up to the plate at Monterrey to commit more of their resources towards international development. Prime Minister Chrétien committed to increase Canada's aid by at least eight per cent a year for the coming years, an increase which is projected to double Canada's current nominal aid level in 8 or 9 years. Prime Minister Chrétien has also made a personal commitment to highlight development in Africa on the agenda of the upcoming G8 summit in Kananaskis, Alberta. The G8 is going to be discussing their own response to the NEPAD at the summit. The Africa Action Plan's goals are going to support the principles outlined in the NEPAD.

Canada has already allocated \$500 million to supporting the Africa Action Plan. Canada is committed to working with Africans towards sustainable development. It is going to take time. It is going to take more hard work. There are going to be set-backs and new challenges along the way. But Canada has been working with Africans for many years now; and we are still there today; and we will be there for as many tomorrows as it takes. Canadian and African partners have been working together for nearly 50 years now. The engagement of CIDA itself in Africa dates to the very beginnings of the

agency. Although they're not always well-known, Canada shares long-established links with many African countries which have been strengthened in the fellowship of the Commonwealth and La Francophonie.

Both African countries and Canada have populations that reflect a wide diversity of ethnicities, religions, and languages. Canada, as with all Western countries, shares some parts of a Western cultural tradition that made a habit of borrowing from African cultures - from the sciences of Ancient Egypt to the styles and rhythms of modern African art. Most importantly for Canada, over a million Canadians today are of African descent. These ties are bringing us closer. On multilateral levels, as well, Canada has a long history of involvement in Africa and the world.

However, I don't want to gloss over the difficulties we are going to face in maintaining, and building, on current momentum in Canada and in the world right now. The development gap between Africa and the rest of the world at this time is widening, not being bridged. And it is no less than the gap of understanding between the world views of people, who, in Canada lament our ignorance of history, and in Africa can describe history as a rock they have to struggle to get out from under. My challenge to the people in this room is to apply your talents and abilities towards turning history around here. Let's reverse the development gap. Let's bridge the gaps of understanding. Let's start now, in dialogue with each other.

At the same time, let's keep the vision in mind, and realize that it is going to take a long-term commitment to get there. We need to have the patience and the courage to let NEPAD unfold. We need clear priorities and concrete action. The markers we look for should be progress, not perfection; and we have to realize what a difference any progress is, from the current state of going backwards. Long-term political will is always fragile everywhere, however. So it's going to be up to you to keep up the pressure on your leaders, in Africa, and in Canada. I don't mind you setting a higher bar for me. You should be setting a higher bar for your governments and the leaders in your societies as well. Political will comes from the people.

As I said earlier, we need public dialogue on the NEPAD, and development in Africa. Everyone needs to know that we're not just labouring to fit one stone against another. They need to know that we're working on building an enduring legacy for the benefit of the whole world. The growing and continuing marginalization of Africa from the globalization process presents a serious barrier to the prosperity of Africa, and a threat to global stability. It has been said that "Poverty anywhere is a danger to prosperity everywhere." In the context of today's global village and global markets, that statement is becoming more true every day. We must make globalization work for everybody, including the people of Africa.

The NEPAD has mobilized dialogue in Africa, among the G8, and around the world. And that is an opportunity in itself. The NEPAD is not written in stone, but it is available to us now, as a solid foundation on which to base our discussions. Whether or not we agree or disagree with the specifics of the NEPAD, this concept of a renewed partnership has captured our attention and created a condition for unprecedented dialogue on the future of Africa. It has been a very positive step forward in getting people to talk about the challenges facing Africa, and what they mean for the world. Just taking this

conference as an example, we have brought together such intellectual giants as Professor John Atta-Mills and Dr. Abdul Rahman Awl, who will be speaking to us shortly. We do have our work cut out for us. But if we don't grasp this opportunity...If Africans don't work on showing positive results from development initiatives--peace, good governance and growing prosperity... If Canadians don't work on building and maintaining the political will in Canada to support the sustainable development of Africa... If we fail to take advantage of this moment in time, or to build upon the momentum now... History will never forgive us.

So let us speak openly and honestly to one another this weekend. And let us all listen to each other with respect. Because the bottom line is, we are all here because we care. We want to see an Africa that retains the richness and diversity of its history, culture and environment, while at the same time taking its rightful place in the international community. We want Africans to share the benefits of development with industrialized countries. And most of all, we want all African people to have the opportunities to realize their potential and their dreams. Thank you for listening to me: now it's going to be my turn to listen to all of you. Tufanye kazi pamoja. Let's work together. Let's build together.