

BACKGROUND

CANADA AND AFRICA: TRUE PARTNERS

Africa is at a turning point. In recent years, the continent has embarked on a difficult course of major political, social and economic change. The economic regression, or at best stagnation, of the 1980s has forced many governments to adopt ambitious structural adjustment programs that are seriously affecting the relationship between citizens and the state.

More than half of the African nations have already set out on the path of reform. Many others are preparing to do so. Abandonment of authoritarian regimes in favour of democratic institutions, openness to political pluralism, and the encouragement of private initiative in economic life are all trends underlying the movement toward change that is sweeping through Africa. Such change will be accompanied by jolts that will attract worldwide attention.

This upheaval in Africa is occurring at a time of transformation on the international scene. The end of East-West rivalry, the emergence of a united Europe, the increased appeal of a pluralistic society and a market economy as models, and the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa are all factors that are leading Africa to question its present and future. More than ever, Canada plans to support the efforts of African countries during this difficult phase of their development toward political institutions and an economic system that better reflects the aspirations of Africa's peoples.

Canada has always shown solidarity with Africa. From the independence movement of the 1960s to the current hard times, Canada has continually proved its partnership and its concern for beneficial and sustainable development. Canada's linguistic duality and its membership in the Commonwealth and La Francophonie have facilitated the emergence of a better understanding of African realities in the hearts and minds of many Canadians and their leaders. For 30 years, Canada has supported the struggle against racism and apartheid in the southern part of the continent. Canada will continue to support and encourage the search for solutions to the conflicts that persist in Africa.

Canada has been a fervent supporter of the North-South dialogue. Links forged within the Commonwealth and La Francophonie have justifiably led many African countries to rely on Canada as their advocate with the industrialized world and international financial institutions. Canada has not betrayed this trust. Our efforts in the search for a solution to the external debt problem well illustrate the Canadian attitude.