

V. BACKGROUND

Over the past few years, the need for bold initiatives to address the challenges of African development has been widely acknowledged in international institutions and other international forums.

Canada's commitment to playing a leadership role in building a partnership to address Africa's development challenges in the 21st century was made clear when in 2001. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien indicated that Africa was going to be a priority focus at the G8 meetings he was scheduled to chair in Kananaskis, Alberta in June 2002.

At the 2001 G8 Summit in Genoa, Italy, Prime Minister Chrétien argued in favour of an enhanced and coordinated international assistance to Africa because, "Aiding Africa is not charity, it's an investment." At their meeting in Genoa, G8 leaders undertook to support an "Africa Action Plan" to be adopted at the Kananaskis Summit.

Since Genoa, Prime Minister Chrétien, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac, have taken a leadership role in coordinating the G8 group of industrialized nations and the international financial institutions (IFIs) to form a global partnership with African countries and leaders. Some of the priority areas identified include aid, debt relief, trade, investment, market access, infrastructure development and poverty alleviation.

The heightened interest of G8 leaders in African developmental needs, constrained by the continent's marginality in the global economy, followed on years of groundwork and active multilateral consultations by leaders from the African continent, led by South Africa, Senegal, Nigeria, Algeria and Egypt. The result was the ambitious "made in Africa" plan by African leaders calling for a global partnership for African development.

The 68-page founding document for this partnership was entitled, "New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development" (NEPAD) and was formally endorsed as a pan-African initiative by the African Union (AU). It called for "a new relationship of partnership between Africa and the international community, especially the highly industrialized countries, to overcome the development chasm that has widened over centuries of unequal relations."

In the spirit of the NEPAD founding document, the Symposium organizers decided to use language that reflected an afro-optimism, thus concepts such as "renewal" and "options" were fore-grounded. Other concepts such as "African Century" and an "African renaissance" recognized the importance of language and discourse in shaping the imagination and our understanding of what is possible – including in Canadian foreign policy.