

# FRIENDS OF THE GREAT LAKES

## Canada co-chairs an organization to support the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

Canada is taking a leadership role to support an African-led process for peace, security, democracy and development in the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

The process, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, co-sponsored by the United Nations and the African Union, primarily involves Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. This troubled

region is home to one fifth of the world's 25 million internally displaced people. It is also among the hardest hit by the AIDS pandemic, with 4 million people living with HIV/AIDS and 3.2 million AIDS orphans. The issue of food security—complicated by conflict, arbitrary violence and displacement—remains a major challenge as well.

In June 2003, the core countries involved in the Conference held their first meeting and defined four themes: peace and security; democracy and good governance; development and economic integration; and social and humanitarian issues. Among its

objectives, the Conference aims to reinforce regional integration through commerce, communications and other common development projects, such as energy grids, leading to closer regional ties. Progress could also be made on the longer-term goals of free trade, the free movement of people and other community-building measures.

The countries of the region are looking to the international community to accompany them

as partners in this long-term process by providing political, diplomatic, financial and technical assistance. Following consultations with the UN and the African Union, Canada created the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region, which will ensure that the international community provides adequate support to the Conference and the core countries.

The Group is composed of 28 countries and 10 international organizations. Canada, which allocated an initial amount of \$1.5 million to the Conference, manages its activities and operations jointly with the Netherlands.

Canada has been closely involved in the region's peace process for many years. It led the Multinational Force to the eastern Congo and Rwanda in 1996 and participated in the UN-mandated European-led Operation Artemis, an interim emergency multinational force deployed around Bunia in the northeastern DRC. This was in addition to its normal contribution to the UN Observer Mission in the DRC.

On the diplomatic front, Canada helped in the negotiation of a peace agreement in Burundi, which led to the Arusha Accords. It was also active in the Lusaka Accord, which officially ended the war in the DRC. More recently, Canada supported the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, which provided for the creation of a transitional government and parliament in Kinshasa, which is now in place, and a commitment to hold national elections in 2006. 🍁

