

INTRODUCTION

Issues relating to security in Africa have taken on singular importance in recent years. La Francophonie has not remained idle in the search for strategies, not only for resolving conflicts which are already underway but for conflict prevention.

Canada has decided to take certain initiatives, among them organizing meetings and discussion forums under the aegis of La Francophonie. These meetings will consist of round-table discussions attended by small groups of national experts, who will discuss common concerns such as the protection of minorities, migration and economic development, demilitarization and social development, light weapons, and land mines. The purpose of these meetings is to facilitate dialogue on the main points in contention between neighbouring states, and among groups within these states, which could lead to agreements to settle the problems which are at the source of the disputes.

The discussions reported below were informed, first and foremost, by this Canadian policy perspective and were intended to indicate concrete avenues by which Canada can put its capabilities to the best possible use, in view of its "comparative advantages." The meeting aimed to identify the most pressing problems in Africa in general, and perhaps in the target countries in particular, while bearing in mind Canada's capabilities, with a view to enabling a successful start to the round-table discussions and ensuring that Canada's participation is truly useful, relevant and effective.

1. Perspective: Identifying the Nature and Context of the Problems

While recognizing the importance of addressing the concerns and requirements of the people who must make decisions in the short term, the approach adopted at this meeting entailed a more comprehensive analysis of economic and political processes. The purpose of this approach was to identify the major constraints which are liable to spark or exacerbate conflicts, create political destabilization, and indeed doom to failure short-range strategies which were considered promising not so long ago. The papers and subsequent discussions were divided into two sections: short-term proposals (relating to minority rights, social and economic rights, arms control, etc.) were addressed,¹ but only after the environment had been better defined through analysis of the reforms and the

¹ Please refer to the following texts in the appendix: Denis Tougas, "Droits et prévention des conflits. Droits de la personne en Afrique"; Charles-Philippe David, "Le contexte de la sécurité internationale. Nouvelles tendances et changements"; Aziz Fall, "Quelques perspectives africaines concernant les questions de sécurité"; William Shabas also delivered a paper on the protection of minorities at this meeting, which was based on his text "Génocide, autodétermination et protection des minorités: la prévention des conflits en Afrique," the core of which has been published in the Proceedings of the International Francophone Conference held September 19 to 22 in Ottawa, *Prévention des conflits: perspective africaine*, Government of Canada, pp. 174-199.