

The task ahead for Africa is not an easy one. The changes required will not occur without the tremendous work and dedication of African citizens. Canada recognizes that the movement toward democratization will not be without difficulties. Inevitably, political change does not occur without problems or unexpected detours. Nonetheless, it is important for the democratization process to take root, respecting African customs, traditions and values, in order for the process to become well-anchored and for it to provide hope for future African generations.

Supporting the process of democratization and good governance only to election day is not sufficient in newly democratizing nations. Elections are but a first step of many, albeit a crucial one. Canada must therefore be committed to continued support for the development of good governance.

From the Canadian perspective, the changes that are taking place in Africa are welcome ones. In recognizing the need for change, and the potential for growth that exists in these countries upon achieving political and social stability, Canada can grasp an important opportunity by continuing to support this transition.

We also should not underestimate the economic ties Canada has established with Africa. Our African trade involves every Canadian region and has allowed many companies to make more effective use of their knowledge and technology. This is of significant benefit to Canadians, who gain not only market access but also jobs and greater economic security for themselves. By applying its knowledge and supplying its products where the demand emerges, Canada maintains and increases its competitiveness.

Mr. Speaker, it is worth recalling that the United Nations, the Commonwealth and la Francophonie are major multilateral organizations through which Canadians and Africans have been closely associated. Many of our honourable members may not be aware that African countries comprise 30 percent of UN membership, 27 percent of the Commonwealth and 52 percent of the countries in la Francophonie.

The linguistic, cultural and historical ties between our nations have existed far longer than our relationships through aid programs. Indeed, Canada's bilingual and multicultural nature has been an important factor in building those long-term relationships. That is the foundation upon which we can take the opportunity to build a long and fruitful partnership well into the future, if we have the political will to do so. In my opinion, we cannot afford not to. Our foreign policy review will help us to focus on how to manage our programs most effectively.