

Canada and the Economic Summits

Overview

In a departure from past summits, Birmingham will be a "leaders only" event, focused on a few select themes. Ministers of foreign affairs and finance will meet a week earlier in London. These innovations follow from ideas put forward by Canada's Prime Minister prior to the Halifax Summit in 1995, with a view to fostering a greater degree of informality among leaders. Birmingham will follow the precedent set at Denver, the first Summit of the Eight, with Russia as a summit partner.

Leaders' discussions in 1998 will focus on themes centred on globalization and the growing interdependence of nations. The agenda will deal with growth, employability and social inclusion; international crime and drugs; and global economic issues, including development, climate change, trade, and the Asian financial situation and its implications for the international system. Leaders may also discuss pressing political issues. Ministers' discussions will include a range of ongoing global and human security issues.

Summit countries are among the world's leading industrialized and democratic economies and share many common values and objectives. The summit process remains a unique and valuable forum for informal and candid exchanges of views on domestic and international issues and provides an opportunity to forge greater co-operation.

In recent years, the topics for discussion have increased in scope to reflect the wide range of global and regional issues that shape the evolving economies of the G-8 countries. This flexibility has allowed the G-8 to expand or focus its annual agenda to respond to issues of immediate global and regional concern.

Leaders can provide political impetus for major initiatives, commit to greater G-8 co-operation in tackling problems, and prompt action in other international forums, primarily in the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the World Trade Organization.

Canada has made valued contributions to the summit process by advancing key thematic issues such as sustainable development, reform of international institutions, peace building and conflict prevention, respect for human rights, and the elimination of anti-personnel mines. The following highlights of summit history demonstrate how the process has adapted to changing needs.