



Statements and Speeches

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CANADIAN POLICY IN AFRICA

Address by the Honourable Pierre De Bané, Minister of State for External Relations, to the Canadian Institute for African Affairs, Montreal, February 23, 1982

...During the course of my various duties, I have had the pleasure of visiting many African countries — countries of the Maghreb, from where I recently returned, of West Africa, of the Sahel and of Central Africa. In my travels, I came to appreciate the broad diversity of the continent and its peoples and, everywhere I went, I became aware of warm feelings of friendship towards Canada. Why does this warmth, this friendliness exist? That will be the theme on today's subject of Canadian policy in Africa.

Our relations with Africa constitute an important element of our foreign policy. This is hardly surprising, since Canada has diplomatic relations with more than 140 countries, a third of them African. However, statistics do not explain the tremendous dynamism of our relations with Africa. The fact of the matter is that for reasons which I will try to explain, Canadian programs relating to Africa are expanding rapidly, at rates that have still not reached a peak.

As evidence of this expansion and the vitality of our relations, I should mention in passing that Canada has a network of 20 diplomatic missions in Africa, accredited in all independent states of the continent. Since relations are two-way, Canada has in turn approved 28 African embassies and high commissions in Ottawa, as well as 28 consular offices throughout the country.

To comprehend fully this phenomenon and to appreciate the rapid growth of Canado-African relations, we should step back in time and review the question from the beginning. The Canadian presence in Africa dates from the start of the century. From that time, many Canadian missionaries chose that continent for their humanitarian work. Many thousands of missionaries thus served in Africa over the years, especially in the fields of health and education. They founded schools and colleges which contributed to the education of the African ruling class. They were the precursors of our relations, today so diversified, and the first Canadian witnesses of the African reality. Their actions and words reinforced the strong affinities which have always existed between Africa and Canada.

These affinities were partly strengthened by linguistic factors. Thus, French-speaking, Catholic Canadian missionaries were particularly interested in West and Central Africa, and English-speaking, Protestant Canadian missionaries established themselves primarily in Commonwealth Africa. These were natural patterns and they in no way
