

The Liberal government does not come to its foreign policy review with a blank slate. Even while in Opposition, we consulted with the Canadian people on a wide variety of issues such as UN [United Nations] reform, aid, human rights and sustainable development. Our principles have been clearly articulated, and it is upon the basis of these that we wish to review our foreign policy. It is my own fervent wish that at the end of the process we will be able to articulate a more coherent foreign policy throughout which the various elements of aid, trade, defence, environment, health, agriculture, immigration and politics will complement each other.

In the past, elements of Canadian foreign policy have often operated without consideration of their effects upon other policy areas. This resulted in policies that often worked at cross-purposes and that ran the risk of cancelling out each others' benefits. Our fragile planet cannot withstand the continuation of this short-sighted approach. Scarce resources, public and private, must be harmonized to maximize our limited capabilities. We need a full foreign policy review to help us better understand how to achieve coherent results.

My specific purpose in addressing this debate today is to highlight the relevant issues from the perspective of my areas of responsibility: Latin America, which includes the Caribbean, and Africa.

I would like to begin with some reflections first on Africa. As a continent that is rich in culture, human resources and geographic wonders, it is, I believe, worth our attention and consideration.

Africa currently has a population of 650 million people -- a figure that could double by the year 2010. Canadians need to determine what kind of impact 27.5 million Canadians can have that will improve the conditions of life faced by 650 million Africans. What can we do when the people of Africa are forced to eradicate their own natural resources for the purpose of survival? It is in those situations that environmental concerns become as much a security issue for Canada as terrorism.

The nature of Canadian aid to Africa has changed in recent years. More and more of our dollars are spent in providing relief, not development assistance, relief augmented by peacekeeping and defence dollars, dispensed in response to social, economic and political upheaval. Ultimately, Canada is forced to make huge contributions to alleviating refugee programs, at home and abroad. We must recognize the immense costs of social, political and economic crises and their linkage to our own well-being at home here in Canada.