

# DISARMING AFRICA ONE FACE AT A TIME

**Diplomat Bob Fowler has a passion for Africa. As he retires after almost four decades in Canada's foreign service, he takes with him more than just memories.**

Diplomacy is all about words, but sometimes pictures do speak louder. As evidence, one need look no further than the office of Bob Fowler, Canada's Ambassador to Italy and the Prime Minister's

Personal Representative for Africa. The white-washed room in a former seniors' residence in Rome is lined with more than 100 framed photographs taken by Mr. Fowler around the world. From many of them gaze the faces of Africans pictured in some of the most dangerous and destitute regions of the continent. Yet these faces reveal more hope than hardship, more pride than privation. They are images that reflect Mr. Fowler's passion for Africa, and for capturing through photography the strength and dignity of those who live there.

In a foreign service career that has spanned almost four decades, Mr. Fowler has travelled to most parts of the world, "including some of our time's

most appalling circumstances," witnessing the ravages of civil war, genocide and grinding poverty in places such as Somalia, Rwanda, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, northern Uganda and Darfur. Yet, at 61, and planning for retirement this summer, he looks back on a multi-faceted life reflected in the faces of his pictures.

"Through photography, I've sought to explore who we are, where and how we live, what unites and divides us, and to celebrate the indomitable human spirit," he says.

Mr. Fowler has worn many hats that have allowed him to combine the two deep interests he's had since he was a teenager: a fascination with Africa and an equally intense ardour for photography.

Born in Ottawa and raised in Montreal, in 1968 Mr. Fowler travelled to Central Africa to teach English at the new Université nationale du Rwanda in Butare. It was a position in which he says he learned much more than he taught. And it was there he caught "the Africa bug."

Although he is inextricably linked to Africa, he has never been posted there. He joined Canada's foreign service in 1969 and had assignments in Paris and two postings to Canada's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York, but also held a number of senior positions in Ottawa, including serving in the Privy Council Office from 1980 to 1986 as Foreign



Faces of hope: Canadian Ambassador Bob Fowler visits a refugee camp near Gulu in northern Uganda.

Policy Advisor to prime ministers Pierre Trudeau, John Turner and Brian Mulroney. He was Assistant Deputy Minister (Policy) in the Department of National Defence from 1986 to 1989, and Deputy Minister of Defence from 1989 to 1995.

But Africa has always beckoned. As Canada's Ambassador to the UN from 1995 to 2000, he travelled widely there as chair of the Angola Sanctions Committee, participating in the successful effort to bring the 25-year-old civil war that had devastated Angola to an end.

His assignment as Ambassador to Italy (as well as Albania, Malta and tiny San Marino) in late 2000 meant that he would continue to travel widely on the continent as Canada's permanent representative to the UN agencies based in Rome: the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

Nine months after being posted to Italy, Mr. Fowler was appointed as the Prime Minister's G8 Personal Representative (Sherpa), requiring him to return to Canada for a year to prepare and organize the June 2002 Kananaskis Summit. "Double-hatted"

as the Prime Minister's Personal Representative for Africa, he led the development of the G8 Africa Action Plan

adopted at Kananaskis, which contained 110 commitments undertaken by the G8 in response to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the African-led, visionary initiative aimed at achieving sustainable development and poverty reduction in partnership with the international community.

On his return to Rome in July 2002, he continued to play a large role in African affairs, still acting as the Prime Minister's Personal Representative for Africa and representing Canada at the Africa Partnership Forum, which brings together high-level representatives from Africa and the G8 and other donors and agencies to monitor the implementation of commitments made in relation to NEPAD.

Last May he was named head of the Prime Minister's Special Advisory Team on Sudan, which included senators Mobina Jaffer and Roméo Dallaire. The team has coordinated and developed Canada's effort to resolve the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Darfur, where hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and nearly half the population now lives in camps. Mr. Fowler spent a month last year travelling in all three Darfuri states and eastern Chad to assess the situation and report back to the Prime Minister. As the effort to bring peace to Darfur continues,

he has worked with partner countries, the UN and the African Union to establish an effective ceasefire and a durable peace through inter-factional negotiations.

Mr. Fowler has taken a particular interest in the ravages of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the links between the disease, drought and food insecurity in southern Africa. He has also promoted efforts to put an end to the actions of the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda, which, in addition to exacerbating the crisis in Sudan, have resulted in the abduction of more than 30,000 children and condemned 1.7 million people—90 percent of the northern Ugandan population—to living in squalid, largely forgotten and under-supported refugee camps.

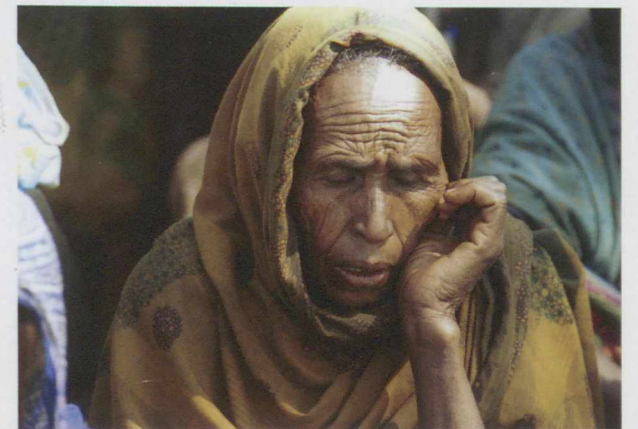
Through it all he takes photos, although he says he has "not sought to chronicle the immediate horror of such situations," leaving that to other, "braver" photojournalists.

He and his wife Mary, an employee of the Canadian International Development Agency who headed the UN Mine Action Unit in New York and now manages grants and trust funds for the World Food Programme, have four grown daughters whom he says "have inherited our fascination with peoples, cultures and environments." They also have two grandchildren and are about to have a third.

Mr. Fowler's favourite photographic subject "to the exclusion of almost everything else has been people; principally, faces." His pictures of Africans of many diverse cultures and nations—and their struggles—inspire him most.



Bunia Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp, Ituri Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo



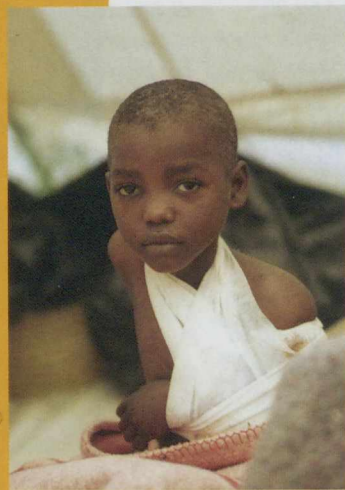
Central Ethiopia



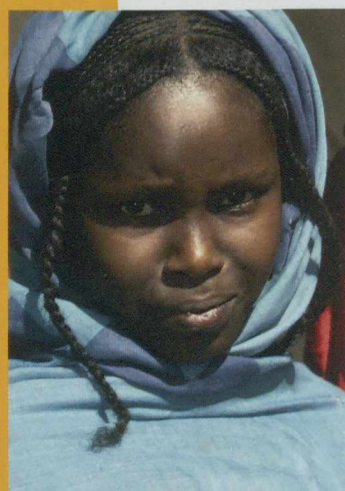
Lalibela, Ethiopia



Krindling II, IDP camp, West Darfur, Sudan



ICRC hospital, Kigali, Rwanda



Kebkabiya Village, North Darfur, Sudan