

la Francophonie, an organisation originally formed to protect and promote the French language and culture, should now begin to play a more overtly *political role* in the critical area of conflict prevention.

La Francophonie presents another opportunity for building the indigenous capacities of regional organisations to address conflict situations within their own regions. This contributes to the trend towards *regional capacity-building* in peace and security which the UN Secretary-General has recommended in his *Agenda for Peace*, particularly in the area of preventive diplomacy. Regional organisations are often better informed about local disputes and tensions, and have more of a vested interest in promoting preventive action to secure regional stability. They are also more familiar with the local conflict actors, and are thus in a better position to engage these in diplomatic initiatives. It was the conclusion of the participants at the International Francophone Meeting that preventive diplomacy in Africa should in fact be the province of regional organisations.

There are also several factors at play that make it possible and reasonable for la Francophonie to contribute to conflict prevention in Africa. Some of the most serious crises in Africa today involve member states of la Francophonie: Rwanda, Burundi, Niger, and Zaire for example. As well, the organisation is currently in a state of *internal institutional ferment* over the appropriate roles it should pursue in the future. In this period of reassessment and change, there are greater opportunities for proposing new initiatives such as conflict prevention.

In its support for building a conflict prevention capacity into the work of la Francophonie, Canada intends to follow a three-part strategy:

- 1) The government will continue to encourage la Francophonie to *complement the OAU's conflict prevention activities*.
- 2) A series of *Francophone discussion groups* will be introduced in *Burundi*. The first of these will involve journalists, and it is hoped that other such groups will be organised for military officers and for parliamentarians.
- 3) *Regional roundtables* will be proposed to address the non-military aspects of a problem relating to internal conflicts, with a view to promoting a dialogue between governmental and non-governmental actors on the unconventional threat to security and stability.