

Canada recently contributed a \$2.5 million "umbrella" program to help fund a range of initiatives undertaken by the Mechanism, but it is important to note that the setting of priorities and project decision-making are under the sole control of the OAU. As the designated administrator of the fund, the OAU assumes full program accountability and responsibility, and this may well set a positive precedent as a model for other donor-OAU arrangements. It is encouraging that since 1993, the OAU has already undertaken a number of peacemaking and confidence-building efforts. It has engaged in preventive diplomacy in over ten countries, sent a limited military observer mission to Burundi, and appointed two special representatives of the Secretary-General, to Burundi and to Liberia.

The success of the new proposed mechanism will depend upon the effectiveness of the Bureau of Assembly, which will be its central organ. On behalf of the Assembly, the Bureau will make decisions on conflict prevention, peacekeeping and the deployment of military forces. An effective *early warning system* will be the key to these strategies, and will have to address these issues: 1) what information is needed to identify potential or actual conflict situations; 2) how will this information be obtained; 3) what forms of intervention will be matched to this information; 4) will the consent of the state government be necessary for intervention.

From the Canadian policy perspective, the primary issue is determining what *Canada's comparative advantage* is in assisting the OAU with the implementation of this new conflict prevention mechanism. The mechanism is intended to deal with a broad variety of issues, from prevention and early warning to peacekeeping, demilitarisation, and assisting civil society. Canadian government agencies as well as the non-governmental sector must assess where their specific expertise lies, and how this compares with that of their African partner organisations. A preliminary effort in this direction has been made by the recently-formed Peacebuilding Contact Group. Its purpose is to help facilitate the organisation and dissemination of information among the many non-governmental groups, research institutes, and government departments involved with this issue. The effectiveness of Canadian support will be influenced by a clear determination of the areas of Canadian competence, combined with an appreciation of the potentials and problems within the OAU and the African peacebuilding community.

A necessary first step for this comparative advantage to be determined is the identification of *single points of contact* for each organisation/government. This