

THE JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT

A success for sustainable development— and for young Canadians

When Justin Friesen entered Grade 6 this September in Halifax, Nova Scotia, he had quite a story to tell about his summer.

Last May, at the International Children's Conference on the Environment in Victoria, British Columbia, Justin was one of two delegates selected to attend the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. He arrived in Johannesburg in late August with a long "to do" list that included addressing world leaders, meeting with Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and learning more about the nature of poverty in a developing country.

"I just couldn't speak when we drove by some of the houses in Soweto," says Justin. "It looked like you couldn't even lie down. I've never seen anything like it. It's good that I saw it."

A follow-up to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the Johannesburg Summit ran from August 26 to September 4. On hand were tens of thousands of participants: heads of state and government, national delegates, and leaders from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media, business and other major groups. Their

mission: to re-energize the global commitment to sustainable development by integrating environmental, economic and social priorities. Canada believes that sustainable development can come about only through effective partnerships between government, the private sector, NGOs, local communities and others—including youth.

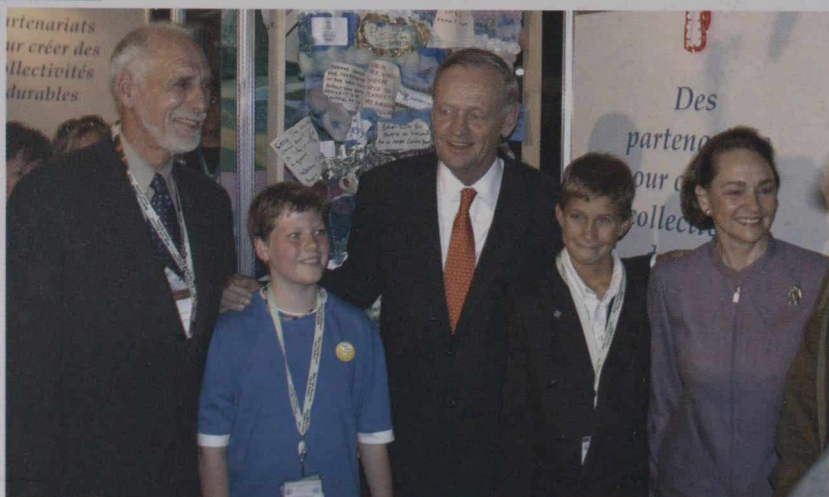
A youth perspective

The UN International Youth Day on August 12 spurred the world's young people to bring their concerns to Johannesburg. From pre-teens in elementary school to young adults working for social change, they made their voices heard loud and clear.

One of them was 11-year-old Ryan Hreljac of Kemptville, Ontario—founder of Ryan's Well Foundation, which contributes funds to help build wells in Africa (see *Canada World View*, Issue 16, p. 19). Ryan travels the world promoting the fundamental right of access to clean water. At the Summit he met with Prime Minister Chrétien and Prince Willem Alexander of the Netherlands. He also delivered a speech along with International Cooperation Minister Susan Whelan.

Ryan took part in a panel session sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on the topic "Water, Poverty and Children." He was one of nine speakers at the event. Among the others: Nane Annan, wife of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan; Swedish Environment Minister Lena Sonmestad; Dr. David Nabarro, Executive Director of Sustainable Development at the World Health Organization; and UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Kul Gautam.

Perhaps what most impressed Ryan at the Summit was a tour of water projects in the squatter and refugee camps outside Johannesburg. He says, "We were able to speak with local people and actually see what their lives were



Youth delegates Justin Friesen and Ryan Hreljac with Environment Minister David Anderson, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Mrs. Aline Chrétien at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg