

The economic slowdown of recent years has hit developing countries hard, especially in Africa. The continent's collective wealth has decreased, leaving each nation and each individual in a more tenuous situation. Unless we are willing to manage the allocation of national wealth closely, the scarcity of resources and the disparities will lead to the breakup of nations, population shifts and inevitable friction between nations and ethnic groups.

To be successful, governments must also recognize the fundamental role of women in economic and social development. Women continue to feed large populations, to convey the cultural values of peace and solidarity, to rebuild their countries at the grass-roots level. Without the participation of women in the political and economic decision-making process, countries deprive themselves of an indispensable resource.

Encouraged by the commitment made in Cairo in June 1993 by the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity as well as by the action taken by the OAU in Burundi and by certain regional organizations, as in Lesotho, Canada is now actively involved in a dialogue with the OAU Secretariat to develop avenues of co-operation to help achieve the objectives of the conflict prevention, management and resolution mechanism. Canada encourages the OAU to promote complementarity with the African regional organizations, the UN, la Francophonie and the Commonwealth. Today's conference will help pave the way toward implementing this co-operation.

La Francophonie cannot remain silent in the face of the challenges that ongoing and potential conflicts are posing to regional and international security. There is reason to suggest that la Francophonie, in support of the OAU mechanism, should adopt institutional means of playing a preventive and mediatorial role. Of course, we already have programs for the promotion of democratic institutions. But these programs are no longer adequate. It is imperative that member states of la Francophonie make use of the tools available to them by working in concert with the ACCT [Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation], the OAU and the UN to devise courses of action to respond to the new realities. When conflicts break out or are on the verge of degenerating into violent confrontations, someone must act quickly.

The power to act is nothing without the will to act. Rwanda and now Burundi afford proof that the weakness of preventive diplomacy lies not in a lack of ways to identify conflict situations, but in the international community's inability to decide how best to prevent and contain conflicts. In order to play a part equal to its means, la Francophonie needs a mechanism whereby it can make the necessary decisions to contribute toward the efforts of the UN, the OAU and regional organizations.