

This outward projection of a fundamental aspect of Canada — our membership in the Commonwealth plays a similar role — has a double advantage. It contributes to strengthening and fortifying our own identity and thereby to making Canada an indispensable partner in the great Francophone project. Furthermore, it provides all those who speak French in Canada greater access to the world, provides them with an opportunity to shine, to share and be enriched by their contact with the French-speaking countries.

I would like to take advantage of my presence here on your continent, which has contributed so much to the establishment and development of La Francophonie, to assure you, our African partners, that Africa remains a pre-eminent and priority region for Canadian co-operation. The review of our foreign policy and co-operation programs that is currently under way confirms that Canadians want us to maintain our commitment to your region.

Prime Minister Chrétien and I had an opportunity to make these assurances once again to President Soglo of Benin during his visit to Canada last October, when I advised him of Canada's \$4-million contribution to the next Summit, to be held in his country. At the Economic Summit in Casablanca in November, I announced the creation of a \$60-million development fund to support the private sector in the Maghreb. I also recently announced our decision to reopen the Canadian Embassy in Beirut in early 1995. In addition, I have the pleasure of announcing today that Canada will undertake a number of projects over the next five years to fight AIDS in western Africa. These projects, financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), will be administered by a Quebec university, Université Laval, whose competence and excellent reputation are certainly known to many of you. We must struggle against this pandemic disease, with its enormous social and human costs and immense impact on development. Finally, I am sure you are aware that most Canadian bilateral aid goes to Africa, particularly the countries of the Francophone community. The basic aims of this aid continue to be sustainable development, the reduction of poverty, social action, the advancement of women, and good governance.

As you know, I do not number myself among the "afro-pessimists." As that knowledgeable observer of the African scene, President Mitterrand, observed in Biarritz a few days ago, undeniable progress has been made, including in the area of democratization and human rights, despite the problem areas with which we are all familiar.

Canada is all the more encouraged to continue its support for Africa in view of the fact that many countries have made major changes in direction. Through the devaluation of the CFA franc and the establishment of structural adjustment programs, a number of these countries have demonstrated their desire to courageously