

There is some urgency, in my view, to expose and discuss more formally with African leaders the Canadian Government's views on these matters; even more urgent perhaps is that I, as Secretary of State for External Affairs, be briefed at the highest level on the approach of African governments to the second Special Session on Development of the United Nations' General Assembly next Fall. As you know, our Government found itself in a minority situation in the last Parliament; and the necessities of survival forced us to curtail drastically consultations with other governments. This situation has now been remedied, at least for a few years. Consequently, I am now making arrangements for a two-week tour of Western Africa in mid-April; and I am looking forward to this opportunity to acquire a first-hand knowledge of the countries along the Gulf of Guinea and of the drought-affected area of the Sahel. In view of the objectives of Canadian policy in Africa, I hope, in the course of this visit, to reinforce the ties that already link Canada to the independent countries of Africa, to take stock of what has been accomplished so far, and to explain Canadian policies in areas we consider vital.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that Canadians must not make the mistake of regarding the people of Africa simply as "underdeveloped" recipients of our economic aid. We must recognize that Africans have their own history, culture and religion; only by understanding and respecting their traditions can we benefit from their friendship. Conversely, Africans should recognize that Western countries also have their own past and their own social institutions, which are no less worthy of study for appearing somewhat puzzling to the ancient peoples of West Africa.

Much has been made, as you know, of tribalism in Africa and of the difficulties this social phenomenon presents for nation-building in the continent. But you, of all people, should have discovered that Canada is itself to some extent a nation of tribes. There are the English and French Canadian tribes, the Alberta tribe -- even my own Scottish Cape Breton tribe; but we prefer to call them language groups or provinces, or regions. And, of course, I don't have to tell you that interprovincial fights can sometimes be pretty rough! We have devised -- sometimes painfully -- in Canada a way to resolve these conflicts; we call it federalism and I think that Africans could perhaps gain from a closer study of this quite remarkable political system. In due course, I am quite confident that we, in Canada, will have something to learn from the way African states resolve various conflicts of interest between their own communities.