

The Governor General's State Visit to Africa:

STRENGTHENING POLITICAL TIES

When Roméo LeBlanc landed in Dakar, Senegal, on February 12, he became Canada's first Governor General to visit Africa. The 16-day state visit, which also brought him to Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Tanzania and Morocco, marked a new phase in the strengthening of the Canada-Africa partnership. The Governor General was accompanied by the Minister for International Co-operation and Minister Responsible for La Francophonie, Diane Marleau, and a delegation of parliamentarians and representatives from the business community, cultural and academic sectors, and non-governmental organizations.

The visit also demonstrated Canada's support for countries that are playing an increasingly constructive role in regional efforts to bring about peace and stability throughout Africa. Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, indicated its commitment to participating in conflict prevention and peacekeeping missions with its neighbours. It has also set up a regional Peacekeeping Training Centre. Mali is closely involved in peace mediation efforts, notably in the civil strife in Liberia. President Konaré has been a strong supporter of Canada in the campaign for the adoption of the Landmines Convention. He has also championed a moratorium on the import, export and manufacture of small arms, which he proposed to the UN in 1997.

Senegal has participated in several UN and regional peacekeeping missions. It enjoys a close relationship with Canada and was the first African country to host a Francophonie Summit, in 1989. In Tanzania, the Governor General expressed Canada's appreciation for that country's active role in trying to resolve current conflicts in the Great Lakes region, particularly the internal conflict in Burundi.



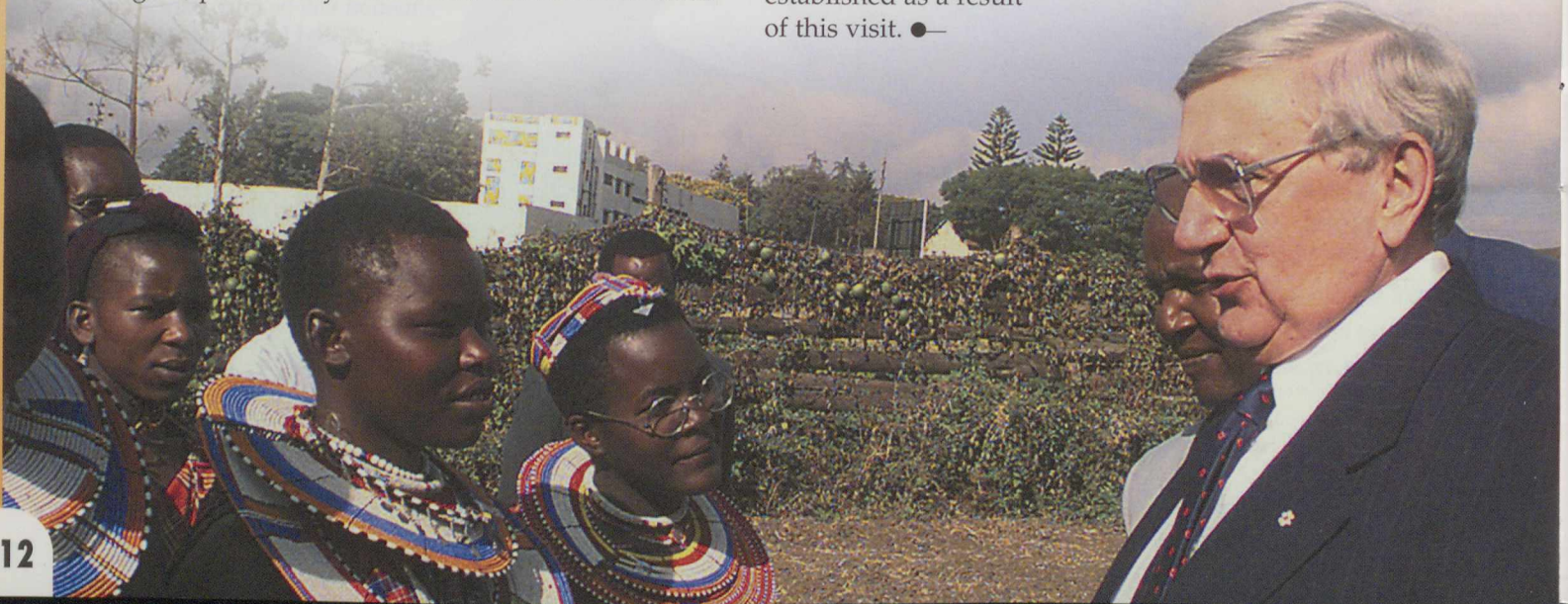
Minister Marleau met with Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, founding president of Tanzania and the facilitator of the peace process in the region; and she took the occasion to announce that Canada, through its Peacebuilding Fund, will contribute \$750 000 to support the Nyerere Foundation and the Arusha Peace Process.

Morocco is a partner of Canada in the multilateral track of the Middle East peace process. In recent years, the two countries have strengthened their relationship and increased their political dialogue. Economic relations are also gaining momentum, particularly since 1996 with the signing of the Declaration of Political, Technological and Economic Partnership.

Strengthening Economic Ties

The 1980s were harsh on African economies, which suffered greatly from the crash of commodity prices and the sudden jump in oil prices. The situation is slowly turning around. In several countries (at least those that have launched economic reforms), recovery is on the way and there are now some promising trade and investment opportunities. Canada's two-way trade has increased with all the countries visited. All are going through privatization processes that are attracting foreign investors, including Canadians. In Senegal, for instance, Hydro-Québec International has won the contract to run the nation's electric utility.

The Canadian business leaders who accompanied the Governor General were able to establish contacts with key government officials and African businesspeople. With the movement toward democratization in many countries, the future of Africa now appears more promising than ever, and partnerships between Canadian and African firms are likely to be established as a result of this visit. ●—



photos: Sgt. Christian Coulombe