

In the NEPAD document, African leaders were optimistic that a steadfast commitment to its principles, priorities and the development of sound policies to support them, has the potential to contribute to the 21st Century becoming known as the "African Century." The Symposium was meant to assess the challenges that need to be confronted, in partnership with the global community, to ensure this optimism manifested in discernable improvements in the lives of ordinary Africa women, men and children.

VI. IMPORTANCE OF THE SYMPOSIUM BEING HELD IN ALBERTA

The plan to hold The G8 and African Renewal Symposium in Alberta arose for several reasons. First, there was a need for public education in Alberta and western Canada on NEPAD, and the African renewal initiatives emanating from the African continent. The Symposium was an opportunity to learn more about the G8 and African renewal initiatives such as NEPAD.

Second, there was a need for a forum in which western Canadian civil society and NGOs, the academic and policy communities, and members of government and the private sector could discuss the implications of NEPAD for Canada and, particularly, the leadership role that Canada promised to play in Kananaskis, Alberta. The Symposium was a space for participants from Alberta and western Canada to dialogue with African participants on the NEPAD and the G8 Action Plan for Africa, as a lead up to the G8 Summit in Kananaskis. It was also a space to discuss the sustainability of the renewal initiatives beyond these elite summits. Symposium participants included Canadian and African non-governmental organizations (NGOs), representatives of Canadian and African governments, and international scholars.

Third, the Symposium was held to help generate a critical mass of people in Alberta and western Canada that was informed about the G8 and NEPAD, and who could contribute to a Canada-Africa policy community and the revitalization of Canadian foreign policy on Africa. To this extent, the Symposium in Alberta was timely. It recognized that Canada needed to respond to NEPAD, in its capacity as head of the G8 Summit to be held in Alberta, as well as because of its longstanding leadership role in multilateral institutions such as the Commonwealth and Francophonie.

Canada's commitments have been several-fold: They have included Africa governance initiatives, teacher education, peacekeeping and conflict management, the abolition of landmines, reduction of small arms, and efforts to reduce conflicts caused by so-called "conflict diamonds."

The Symposium was meant to consider some fundamental questions: Will there be a new foreign policy direction for Canada? Will the articulated priorities in the Kananaskis Action Plan for Africa include education, health care and bridging the digital divide, some of the other topics discussed during the G8 Summits and that are also important to African developmental initiative?