

October 3, 2009

The New Africa: Speaking Notes

- Bonjour mesdames et messieurs. Je suis très heureux et très honoré d'être parmi vous ce matin. Tout d'abord, j'aimerais féliciter Lucien Bradet et ses collègues au CCA pour leur excellent travail en organisant cette conférence, dont le thème est très pertinent à l'heure actuelle.
- Very happy to be here this morning; congratulations to the CCA for organizing this very timely conference, the excellent turn-out certainly speaks volumes about the relevance of the subject matter and I hope that this event will prove to be something of a milestone in Canada's relationship with Africa
- In Canadian foreign policy, we talk a lot about setting priorities, as we should, but I have found that even if Africa does not loom large in the official documents describing Canadian foreign policy priorities, Africa is extremely important in terms of what we actually do every day in our international activities; and African issues have a remarkable resonance with the Canadian public.
- Why does Africa matter? We covered that ground very well yesterday. So I will not go over it again in detail. The reasons are many-- humanitarian, security, social, commercial, but one aspect not covered was political -- and by political, I mean domestic political. During my time in the public service, successive governments devoted hundreds of millions of dollars to various causes and crises in Africa, not only, I think, because the Ministers and Prime Ministers thought it was the right thing to do, but also because their political instincts told them that the Canadian public demanded it of them.
- In part, this reflects a deep-seated humanitarian instinct in the Canadian population, but it also reflects the political pressures on Canadian governments of different persuasions to be engaged in Africa.
- Furthermore, you do not always have the luxury of choosing by yourself what foreign policy priorities you might wish to have. Who would have thought 10 years ago that Afghanistan would be at the centre of Canadian foreign policy today? Who would have thought 10 years ago that the Canadian Government

would spend over half a billion dollars on the crisis in Darfur? And in my experience, getting this money was not the hardest thing to do. In fact, the bureaucracy was sometimes under pressure to find ways to spend even more. Although the key question should always be not how much you spend, but how well you spend.

- There is also a key international dimension. G8 Summits often spend a remarkable amount of time and energy on African issues. The last summit in Canada at Kananaskis was a case in point, and if anyone thinks there has been a slackening G8 interest since, look at the G8 communiqué from L'Aquila Summit in July. 13 pages or 40 paragraphs. I didn't see that kind of attention to other issues or other regions.
- Of course, part of this has been spurred by celebrity diplomacy. Unlike some, I don't think of this as all bad, even if the prescriptions of the celebrities are more than a little naïve. At least it galvanized attention for some pretty appalling situations.
- For those in the development field, Africa is it. Not that there isn't poverty elsewhere, notably in central and south Asia and pockets in the Americas. But the struggle to achieve the Millennium Development Goals will be won or lost in Africa.
- There is an important security dimension to our interest in Africa. If you look at the agenda of the Security Council over the past twenty years or so, around 65-70% of the items are African. Again, some may say Africa is not a priority, but if we aspire to the Security Council, what will we be spending our time and effort on? This is an issue that our G8 partners readily understand. The question is whether or not Canada will be well-equipped to deal effectively with African issues when they come before the Council.
- One of the greatest challenges of our time-- climate change, which was mentioned by a couple of speakers yesterday. For Africa, much of the debate about the origins of climate change is beside the point. Because the point is that climate change is occurring and some of the severest impacts will be in Africa. And I think it would be a mistake to assume that the impact of the crisis from climate change will be limited to Africa.
- Commercially, Africa matters to Canada quite a lot. We saw some interesting figures yesterday and my sense is that the growth path for Canadian investment,

assuming that we really are coming out of the recession, will be very robust again.

- So, for all this, what do we need to be effective in pursuing the broad range of Canadian interests in Africa. I will risk oversimplifying and say we need one thing above all-- and that is knowledge. We need people who know Africa well, who know its people, its history, its cultures, its languages, its capacities and its requirements.
- But are we positioned to maintain and develop this knowledge? My answer is maybe. Because Canadian companies are building commercial networks; Canadian civil society is building social and developmental networks; the diaspora is building people-to-people networks. But what is happening to our official network, our diplomatic network? These other networks need the anchor of a diplomatic network, for in most African countries, governments are still centrally involved in social and economic development and relate most easily to a well-informed, energetic diplomatic service, which obviously has to be present to be effective.
- What should Canada do?

I will leave you with ten ideas.

1. Canada should stop running down its diplomatic infrastructure in Africa if it wishes to be a serious member of the G8, of the Security Council and retain a meaningful role on the Continent.
2. Canada should rethink some aspects of its development assistance programs, and place emphasis less on the volume of development assistance and more on its quality. I think few would argue that the development results we and our African partners have achieved are in any way proportional to the money and effort we have invested in development assistance in Africa. About \$1 trillion over the years, and we are still debating whether it works or not? This breeds a cynicism which is unwelcome in my view, but if there is not more obvious success, we will leave the field open to Dambisa Moyo and others, who are already finding traction for their rather extreme views, especially among those who are already pre-disposed to a negative view of development assistance and are delighted to find an African spokesperson. And a consequence of that traction will be a further dismantling of our diplomatic and development assistance infrastructure.

3. Related to point 2, we need to be honest with ourselves and with our African partners about what our development assistance has and has not achieved. We should not be afraid of honest evaluation, done jointly with our African partners, and make those evaluations timely, not years later when everyone involved has moved on. But we should also not think of evaluation as a criminal investigation; it should be a learning experience. We should make a determined effort to re-examine our development assistance programs with a view to reinforcing African accountability for results. I wonder if we have been too willing sometimes to expend effort and resources where a more rigorous analysis of the prospects for success might have led us to do something different. We should work with partners who are ready to take on this accountability and they are there.

4. Do not trust simple solutions to Africa's development challenges because there aren't any. ITNs are a great tool but we should not think that delivering them by the bale free of charge in African villages will mean the end of malaria. Universal ARVs for people living with AIDS. Again, a good idea, but not if the health care system has fallen apart and the clinics are unstaffed and unequipped. Education for girls. An excellent idea with huge potential but not if there is a lack of serious support in the communities themselves for the girls to complete their schooling. Development is difficult; it is hard work; and making lavish promises of success only breeds cynicism when they are not fulfilled. See point 2 above.

5. With one exception, do not trust "big" ideas. The most successful and sustainable development I have seen has been patient, pains-taking work often on a small scale. Work that focuses on people's capacities and relies mainly on local energies and dedication. If local effort and commitment are not there, then we should pause and think again. The development energy of Africans themselves is remarkable. It is a question of supporting African-led strategies; listening to our partners; accompanying Africa to build on what works and not repeat what has so obviously not worked in the past.

The one "big" idea I would support is a decent MTN result on market access for African exports. Our aid programs can build a lot of schools and clinics, but how can African development be sustained if African countries cannot sell their products fairly on world markets.

6. Use our strengths. What are we good at in Canada? We are good at a lot of things but one of them of particular relevance to Africa is natural resource development in a sustainable way. We have not always done things the right way

in Canada, but I think we have learned over time. We have a lot to share in this area with our African partners.

7. In this context, place more emphasis on the private sector in our development programs to balance the current priorities of health and education. Health and education are obviously important, but programs in these areas tend to build up large public sectors in countries which will never generate the tax revenues to pay for them in the short, medium or long term, unless there is a vibrant private sector which will produce the necessary wealth.

8. Put Trade Commissioners into Africa; do not withdraw them. Our companies, our exporters, our investors need the support where the markets are difficult, not where they are easy. We need them more in Rabat, not in Raleigh. In Nairobi, not in Nashville.

9. This one should be easy. Abolish two and three-year assignments for our diplomatic staff in African posts, except maybe for a few truly difficult places. Four even five years should be the norm, in order to develop the expertise to be really effective and useful in furthering Canadian interests. And we need people-- for our commercial programs, our development programs, and even when we intervene in humanitarian crises, who have a sophisticated understanding of the host country. (I make this argument for all regions, not just Africa.) In short, you will not know enough about a host society to do much good if you are there for 24 months minus weekends and holidays.

10. Finally, we should say the difficult things that need to be said when they need to be said. That does not mean using a megaphone all the time (maybe some of the time). But it means being quietly clear about corruption, about waste, about bad governance. The battle against corruption is raging every day, with African themselves in the lead. We should be very clear where we stand. Our true friends in Africa, and there are many, will, in my experience, appreciate Canada's voice and support.