



TODAY'S PAPER

COMMENT

Don't abandon Africa

The dollar, the war against terror and the rebuilding of Iraq threaten to deprive Africa of its much-needed recovery plan, says former Canadian 'sherpa'

GORDON SMITH

By GORDON SMITH

Monday, May 19, 2003 - Page A11

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Dear Jacques Chirac,

Africa is losing the war against poverty. As host of next month's Group of Eight summit, you can refocus the attention and efforts of the international community toward fighting this war. Leaders of the G8 must promote initiatives that are congruent with the action plan for Africa they agreed to. Africa is doing its part: Development proposals are emerging that meet the G8 criteria and are worthy of G8 support.

With the world seized by the war against terrorism, the reconstruction of Iraq threatens to siphon resources as well as attention away from Africa. But immediate challenges continue to face Africans. AIDS in Africa will claim more lives this year alone than the war in Iraq did. In a continent plagued by an AIDS epidemic, endangered by a famine and destabilized by a civil war in Ivory Coast, poverty and insecurity are mounting. This is only compounded by a shortage of funds. There is little comfort in the African development indicators published by the World Bank last month, and staff there say "Africa will fall far short" of the millennium development goals aimed at halving poverty by 2015.

With almost half of the continent's population -- about 300 million people -- living in abject poverty and heightened frequency of

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drought cycles, the facts of the African crisis are appalling. In an increasingly knowledge-based global economy, fewer than half of Africa's children complete primary school and only one in every 100 Africans has access to a personal computer (not to mention that less than 1 per cent of the continent's 750 million inhabitants have actually gone on-line).

But these dismal numbers mask some encouraging news. Increased multiparty elections in many countries, rising incomes in countries outside of sub-Saharan Africa and strides taken by Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia in their growth rates are notable development achievements. It is these examples of progress that offer pockets of hope; we can build on them. This determination combined with African leadership and developed countries' commitment through the New Partnership for Africa's Development can begin to transform the future.

Following Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's example at Kananaskis last year, your summit at Evian should maintain the G8 focus on Africa and move to implement the New Partnership. NEPAD is designed to radically alter the assumptions underlying international African development-assistance programs. As a move away from a patronizing and ineffective donor-recipient relationship with the developed world, this new partnership is based on mutual respect as well as shared responsibility and accountability.

Critics of NEPAD would do well to move beyond the anachronistic rhetoric of the 1960s and recognize that effective strategies designed by Africans and supported by the international community will provide new momentum and serve as the basis for concrete projects to address poverty and insecurity.

There is evidence that genuine partnership and African-led development projects are possible under the NEPAD agenda. We can decisively move from talk toward implementation and action. Working with the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, the OECD Development Centre and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Centre for Global Studies at the University of Victoria initiated a project last year funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The work resulted in five development initiatives for specific priority sectors of NEPAD designed by Africans to promote socio-economic change.

Strong business cases were provided. Peace and security were addressed through the proposed creation of a central database of illegal natural-resource exploitation that could be used for early

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warning signs of conflict and arms proliferation. A micro-finance fund for West Africa has been designed that would provide resources to eight countries. An initiative on poverty reduction would provide energy to rural populations in sub-Saharan Africa that would build on successes already demonstrated by the use of "multifunctional platforms." The establishment of an African HIV/AIDS consortium targeted toward youth would aim at creating prevention and support programs at universities. A political governance initiative has been designed to produce an African code of electoral norms and standards to guide electoral processes.

Each of the five initiatives lays out strategies and processes to enhance democratic and political security, increase livelihood opportunities, decrease rural poverty and return power over development decisions to their rightful owners: Africans.

As the Evian summit draws near, the plight of millions of Africans should remain atop the G8 program. These five African-led plans represent initiatives that can be developed throughout the continent. The international community should endorse and fund these initiatives to put NEPAD's goals into practice.

In our interdependent world, we cannot afford to tolerate complacency toward the world's poorest. Allowing an entire region to languish in desperation is a prescription for instability, resentment and social breakdown. The forces unleashed will not recognize national borders. With concrete projects and African authorship evident, it is clear that implementation of NEPAD's goals must be at the forefront of the G8 program and the international security agenda. Mr. President, I applaud your past leadership with respect to Africa and await the results of the Evian summit.

Gordon Smith, director of the Centre for Global Studies at the University of Victoria, was deputy minister of foreign affairs from 1994 to 1997 and the prime minister's "sherpa," or personal representative for three years for the G7 and G8 summits, including the last one to have been held in France seven years ago.

