

THE UNITED NATIONS AND CANADA

WHAT CANADA COULD AND SHOULD DO AT THE UNITED NATIONS 2018: A QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP

In order to win a seat on the Security Council Canada needs Africa

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During the 2015 election campaign the government of Justin Trudeau made the return of Canada on the international stage the slogan for its future foreign policy. One of the key elements of this “coming back” was the commitment to gain a non-permanent seat for Canada on the UN Security Council for the 2021- 2022 mandate. At the present stage, this election is far from being won. While Canada did sit on the Security Council every 10 years between 1946 and 2000, it suffered a humiliating defeat in 2010 under the Conservative government. The causes of this debacle are numerous but one appeared particularly critical for analysts in the know: the Africans were not in our corner at the time of voting. Africa represents the largest political block of countries at the UN General Assembly with 54 of the 193 member States of the organization.

Such a block cannot be ignored by any state, all the more so that Africans agree most of the time to adopt common policies at the UN. Yet, both under the Harper government and now under Trudeau’s, Canada ignores Africa in all three critical fields: diplomatic, economic and military. If Canada wishes to win one of the two seats competed for as well by Norway and Ireland at the June 2020 vote, it must urgently develop a Strategy of Engagement with the Continent in the three fields heretofore mentioned.

The first component of this engagement strategy should focus on diplomacy, to be developed along two paths – a stronger physical presence on the ground and a sustained relationship with the leaders of the continent. In the last few decades the diplomatic footprint of Canada in Africa has withered away. The number of embassies and diplomatic missions has dropped from 26 to 21 on a continent of 54 countries. Budgets have been reduced and embassies have become microscopic in size. This contrasts with policies adopted by other developed countries. Turkey now has 40 embassies in Africa, South Korea 22 and Norway, a country of 5 million, competing with Canada for a seat on the Council already has 19 missions in Africa and plans to open two more.

Canadian politicians have to go and meet Africans counterparts if they wish Canada’s candidacy to be taken seriously. The Prime Minister and his Ministers must increase significantly their visits to the continent. This is

something that does not seem to be understood in Ottawa. In 2016, Justin Trudeau declined an invitation to deliver a speech at the Heads of states' summit of the African Union in Kigali, Rwanda. Not surprisingly, he was no longer invited in 2017 and 2018. To this day he has not gone any further than Liberia and Madagascar. Several ministers including Foreign Affairs, National Defence and International Development have been more active. But that is not sufficient. Canada is facing competitors that are very active and some have even decided to copycat the French practice of France-Africa Summits. For example China, India, Japan and the United States regularly organize these kinds of summits where the Head of state of the host country takes the time to meet with each African leader separately. Canada cannot be just a bystander. It must be more ambitious and organize similar Summits.

The second component of this engagement strategy is the strengthening of our economic presence. President Donald Trump's insistence on reviewing the North American Free Trade Agreement from top to bottom has underscored the extent of Canada's dependency on the United States and its limited margin of maneuver on the international stage. Canada's economic presence in Africa it is essentially limited to the mining and oil and gas exploration and extractive sectors. Canadian companies are present in 43 of the 54 countries of the continent. This presence is an asset which cannot be neglected. However, according to the 2017 report of the African Development Bank (ADB) on the Continent's economic perspectives, African growth depends less on natural resources and far more on improving the business environment and macroeconomic governance. Economic diversification and middle-class growth require massive investments in a number of activities such as infrastructure, information and communication technologies, energy, agro food, transportation and hotel management. Quite surprisingly Canada is nearly absent from all these sectors.

The third and last element of this engagement strategy is the Security Dimension. If Canada wishes to benefit from African economic growth and expand its influence on the international stage it should actively engage in the resolution of conflicts on the continent. Africa is the site of the majority of conflicts and crises on the planet today and is host to 8 of the 15 peacekeeping operations of United Nations, 7 of the military and civilian peace missions of the European Union and one mission of the African Union. Finally, Canadians are directly affected by these conflicts. Eight Canadian aid officers and family members have died during the terrorist attacks in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso committed by a jihadist group in early 2016. In May 2018 Ottawa announced the deployment of 6 helicopters within the United Nation mission in Mali (MINUSMA). It is a beginning but it is far from the ambitious plan which had been presented to the Prime Minister in December 2016 which would have made Canada a premier actor for peace in Mali.

Canada is not an unknown quantity in Africa. It has planted long-standing seeds. Its missionaries, its aid offices, its business people, its diplomats and its military have created strong bonds and memories on the Continent going

back to the end of the 19th century. Canada has built colleges and universities in Africa. Canadians have dug wells and mines, built roads and monuments, maintained peace and even waged war there. Unfortunately, that presence is slowly disappearing due to a lack of interest on the part of the Ottawa elites. This is a tragic mistake that needs repairing. At stake is our status in the world and our presence on the Security Council.