



Africa Action Talking Points on the G8 and Africa

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As the Group of 8 (G8) wealthy nations gather once again this weekend for their annual summit, the priorities that they identify and the decisions that they reach will have far-reaching implications. Yet, this global elite consistently fails to seriously consider the priorities and concerns of the majority of the world's population, with drastic consequences for Africa.

The Gleneagles G8: Promises on Africa One Year On

G8 leaders announced in 2005 that Africa would figure prominently on their meeting agenda. The summit at Gleneagles last July promised to address the continent's overwhelming debt crisis, the need for greater development assistance, and the unfair trade regulations hindering Africa's progress. Although greeted with great fanfare, the actual commitments established by the G8 leaders were not nearly enough to achieve the stated goal of ending poverty in Africa. Furthermore, the reluctance of the world's wealthy powers to follow through on their commitments in the past year reveals their lack of dedication to this goal.

- The G8 deal on **debt cancellation** fell far short of "100% multilateral debt cancellation." The 14 eligible African countries reflect only a small minority of African nations in need of debt cancellation in order to combat poverty and ensure social and health services for their populations. In addition, the deal neglects to cancel 100% of any one country's debt, forcing African governments to continue to pay \$14 billion each year to external creditors. The G8 nations must now expand the debt cancellation initiative, and eliminate the harmful conditions it embodies, in order to address the \$200 billion debt burden Africa still faces.
- Another proposed target of the G8 meetings in 2005 was **universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment** by 2010, but thus far few wealthy nations have taken the necessary steps to make this goal a reality. The U.S., in particular, has refused to devote adequate money to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, or to provide new resources or benchmarks to work towards universal access. Now, the U.S. and other G8 countries must scale up their financial commitments to fighting HIV/AIDS and provide greater support to African efforts to combat this pandemic.
- In 1970, donor nations in the United Nations (UN) pledged to work towards the goal of devoting 0.7% of their national income to foreign **development assistance**. At Gleneagles last year, G8 leaders pledged to increase annual foreign aid by \$50 billion by 2010, with a significant proportion going to Africa. But last year, the sum of the various G8 promises to enhance aid still fell considerably short of this target. Importantly, augmented development assistance cannot be effective without 100% debt cancellation;

otherwise funds received are immediately sent back to rich countries in the form of debt payments.

- As rich nations continue to prioritize their own interests, unbalanced **trade** regulations, unfair subsidies, and the dumping of cheap imports on developing countries thwart Africa's ability to compete in the global market. Some reports suggest that trade liberalization has cost sub-Saharan Africa over \$270 billion over the past 20 years. This situation has changed little since last year's G8 meeting, as the leaders of rich countries refuse to establish a deadline for the goal of ending harmful subsidies.

The St. Petersburg G8: On the Lookout for New Action in 2006

Despite last year's professed concern for Africa, this year's G8 summit agenda no longer reflects any concerted effort to address Africa's health, economic, and social challenges. Yet today's most urgent global concerns, many of which are centered in Africa and were discussed at last year's G8 summit, require long-term investment and attention. In addition, while the G8 summit excludes African leadership, Africa, as a member of the global community, has a crucial role to play in addressing the concerns to be discussed at this year's G8, as well as those still absent from the agenda.

- In their discussion of **infectious diseases** this year, the G8 must dedicate a major focus to Africa. The continent faces critical health threats, from the prolonged battle with HIV/AIDS to the more recent introduction of the avian flu risk. The vulnerabilities in Africa's response to global health dangers, emerging from poorly-resourced and overburdened health systems, represent one aspect of a common international weakness and must be addressed in a comprehensive manner. To accomplish this, the G8 must recognize this urgent need and initiate new investment in Africa's public health care and in the fight against poverty.
- The G8 leaders are increasingly pre-occupied with Africa's geo-strategic value, particularly with regard to newly discovered and expanding reserves of oil on the continent. This orientation may again emerge this weekend during G8 discussions of **global energy security**. Yet Africa must not become a playground for such external interests without regard for the negative effect that increasing militarization and environmental degradation have on its populations. Moreover, for those African countries that are not major oil exporters, the impact of skyrocketing oil prices can deplete the funds gained through debt cancellation and increased aid. In considerations of Africa's role in addressing the current global energy crisis, the voices of African leaders and civil society must have a place at the table.
- Through the UN, the international community has set the goal of achieving universal primary education by 2015. As the G8 agenda focuses on **education**, leaders must consider the particular obstructions that prevent Africa's realization of this target. A major consideration in this discussion must be the continent's debt burden, which precludes national spending on education. However, where debt cancellation has been enacted, it has allowed for striking advances in education in some African countries

countries. For example, in 2005, the abolition of school fees in Burundi allowed an additional 300,000 students to enroll, and Zambia's latest budget has allocated resources to hire 4,500 new teachers.

- As the government-sponsored genocide in **Darfur** continues in its third year, the G8 agenda must include discussions on this pressing global issue. Despite a partial peace agreement signed on May 5, 2006, violence has drastically increased and the promise of a ceasefire has been dashed. The death toll is nearing half a million people, and Darfuri civilians face mounting insecurity and humanitarian catastrophe. Meanwhile, G8 nations continue to flout the "Responsibility to Protect," agreed upon by international leaders at the UN last fall. At this weekend's meetings, G8 leaders must act urgently towards bringing about a UN peacekeeping force to protect civilians and humanitarian operations in Darfur.

Last year's G8 summit paid lip service to Africa's priorities, but these priorities remain urgent and must not this year be ignored by G8 leaders. International initiatives and summits concerned with global priorities must remain focused on Africa's challenges. At this weekend's summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, the G8 leaders must commit to fully funding the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, working to strengthen Africa's health systems, canceling 100% of Africa's debt, and addressing the ongoing genocide in Darfur, Sudan. Africa Action exhorts the G8 member states to seize this opportunity to make real progress towards these vital goals.



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