



CIPS POLICY REPORT

**Canada and the African Union:
Towards A Shared Agenda**

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February 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This is an important moment to reconsider Canada – Africa relations. The rules-based international order is in flux, threatened by the rise of illiberal powers like China and Russia and the growing strength of right-wing nationalism and populism in established democracies. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further strained multilateral cooperation and heightened geopolitical divisions. At the same time, Africa is emerging as a strong, dynamic continent, increasingly asserting its own agency and voice in global affairs.
- Canada's intention to develop its first Africa engagement strategy follows a prolonged period of relative neglect, during which time other countries have increased their economic, political, and strategic involvement with the continent. To rebuild its presence and reputation, Canada will need to be consistently and respectfully engaged to establish itself as a serious partner.
- Canada has in the past tended to approach Africa from the perspective of humanitarianism and development. This is increasingly an outdated approach. Canada's future partnership must build on strategic areas of convergence and mutual interests.
- The African Union, as the continent's regional organisation, should be at the heart of Canada's Africa strategy. Canada's ability to develop bilateral relationship with 54 independent states is inevitably limited, and through strategic partnerships with the AU, Canada can maximise its impact and simultaneously strengthen the AU's capacity to act as a norm entrepreneur on the continent and an influential player on the global stage.
- A new engagement strategy for Africa will require significant investment not merely financially, but also in expertise. Given the low priority accorded to the continent in Canadian foreign policy, particularly in recent decades, Global Affairs Canada is short on personnel with in-depth knowledge and sustained experience on the continent. For a new Africa strategy to be effective, a sustained effort to cultivate a cadre of experts is required.
- Two interrelated principles should guide Canada's relationship with the AU. The first is to avoid escalating geopolitical rivalry on the continent. Canada's engagement must be fully cognisant of the current geopolitical environment and Africa's position within it, including its sense of historical injustices and inequalities within the international system. Second, the relationship must be built on mutual respect. Even when there is a difference of opinion and interests, Canada should engage and seek to find mutually beneficial areas of cooperation, without compromising values.

- Canada's engagement with the AU must be focused and targeted in order to break with the legacy of policy inconsistency. The partnership must be guided by the strategic vision outlined in the AU's *Agenda 2063*.
- Possible areas of cooperation include peace and security; women's empowerment and gender equality; trade and support for the African Continental Free Trade Area; engagement of Canada's African diaspora; and cooperation within the United Nations. Canada should look beyond its traditional Western allies and seek to engage the AU as a serious partner in the effort to strengthen and improve multilateral cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

This is an important and opportune moment to re-think and reframe Canada – Africa relations. The rules-based international order is in flux, threatened by the rise of illiberal powers like China and Russia and the growing strength of right-wing nationalism and populism in established democracies. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has further strained multilateral cooperation and heightened geopolitical divisions. At the same time, Africa is emerging as a strong, dynamic continent, increasingly asserting its own agency and voice in global affairs. In this context, Canada is developing its first ever foreign policy strategy for Africa with a view to expand and deepen its engagement with the continent.¹

Despite periodic flourishes, the African continent has never featured prominently on Canada’s list of foreign policy priorities, and the announcement of a forthcoming engagement strategy and the opening of a dedicated observer mission to the African Union (AU) signals a possible change and an opportunity to build a new partnership based on mutual interests. Such a partnership will require time and investment, not only financially, but also in terms of sustained attention, expert knowledge, and cultural and historical understanding.

Canada’s intention to broaden its engagement with Africa comes a time when global powers are jostling for the continent’s attention. Some refer to the “new scramble” for the continent’s abundant resources, be it fertile land, oil and gas, precious metals, or the many rare earth minerals required to produce semi-conductors, cell phones, and high-tech military equipment. With an expanding middle class and a growing population, Africa also offers lucrative export markets. China has been at the forefront of recognising the continent’s economic importance and potential and has replaced Europe and the US as Africa’s largest trading partner and a key source of investment. But China is not alone. Russia, Turkey, India, and the Arab states, amongst others, have all expanded their economic relationships with the continent. This in turn has caused more traditional partners to begin to rethink their approach, gradually recognising Africa not primarily as a continent in need of humanitarian and development assistance, but as an important economic partner.

Politically, there is also a growing awareness of Africa’s significance and influence. With 54 votes in the UN General Assembly and three non-permanent seats in the Security Council, the African bloc is the largest regional grouping and wields considerable influence in multilateral decisions. This has been clearly illustrated in the aftermath of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. While 28 African countries initially voted in favour of a UN resolution condemning the aggression, many abstained from subsequent votes against Russia. A steady stream of foreign leaders and diplomats has since descended on the continent, seeking friends and allies for “their” side in what increasingly looks like a new geopolitical rivalry along Cold War lines.

The current geopolitical tensions not only underline Africa’s centrality in international affairs, but also the need for Canada to develop a considered engagement strategy. As a

¹ Neil Moss, “Oliphant Preps African Engagement Strategy for Cabinet as Canada Readies to Boost Diplomatic Presence”, [The Hill Times](#), (20 July 2022).

middle power, Canada depends on and has benefitted from the rules-based international order, and one of its overarching foreign policy goals is to strengthen and defend the liberal international order.² African countries have also been central supporters of multilateral cooperation, and the AU's Constitutive Act anchors international cooperation in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

At the same time, the AU regards the post-war international order as unequal, hierarchical, and outdated, reflecting the balance of power at the end of World War II when most African countries had yet to gain independence. This has two main implications: First, the AU is actively seeking reform of the UN in order for Africa to gain its rightful place in global affairs. Second, African countries and the AU are wary of being pulled into alliances that might prevent them from charting an independent path in their foreign policy. Scarred by colonialism and the Cold War, African countries and the AU are seeking to pursue strategic partnerships, diversify their relations, and avoid becoming pawns in a larger geopolitical struggle.

For Canada, the challenge is to forge a respectful relationship that identifies and builds on shared objectives, interests, and values and that is fully cognisant of Africa's own interests and agendas. To this end, this report focuses specifically on Canada's relationship with the African Union, as opposed to bilateral relationships with individual countries. As the world's largest regional organization with 55 member states, the AU celebrated its 20th anniversary in July 2022. Increasingly, the AU is speaking with a stronger, more unified voice on the international stage, seeking to position Africa as an influential global partner. As such, the AU is vital for the advancement of Africa's collective agency and interests in international affairs. The report suggests that many of the AU's founding principles and guiding norms support a rules-based multilateral order, and that Canada and the organisation can find common ground in seeking not only to strengthen, but also possibly reform and improve what is commonly known as the rules-based, liberal international order. Through strategic partnership and cooperation with the AU, Canada can also strengthen the organisation's capacity to act as a norm entrepreneur and further economic growth, human rights, and democracy on the continent.

CANADA - AFRICA RELATIONS: CONSISTENT INCONSISTENCY

Africa has never been among Canada's top foreign policy priorities, and its Africa policy has memorably been characterised as one of "consistent inconsistency", given to frequent changes and lacking clear direction and purpose.³

² See Rita Abrahamsen, Louise Riis Andersen and Ole Jacob Sending "Introduction: Making Middle Power Liberal Internationalism Great Again", *International Journal* 2019 74(1): 5-14.

³ David Black, *Canada and Africa in the New Millennium: The Politics of Consistent Inconsistency* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015): 4-8. See also Edward Ansah Akuffo, *Canadian Foreign Policy in Africa: Regional Approaches to Peace, Security, and Development* (London: Routledge, 2012).

Such inconsistency aside, Canada's relationship with Africa is long-standing and wide-ranging, primarily focused on development assistance, peace and security, and political affairs. This includes efforts to alleviate poverty, improve health, increase economic growth, and foster good governance, often in the past provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Peace operations, democracy promotion, and support for multilateral institutions on the African continent have also at times figured prominently. Thus, Canada's Africa policy has been based on a conception of the continent as a space of poverty and conflict that would benefit from Canadian interventions. This stands in contrast with the more prominent areas of Canadian foreign policy, which address economic, political and security co-operation between Canada and major Western states, most importantly of course, the United States.⁴

Since the end of the Cold War, Canada's policy towards Africa can be divided into three overlapping periods. During the Liberal governments of Jean Chr tien (1993-2003) and Paul Martin (2003-2006) Canada prioritised the promotion of development and peace and security through multilateral initiatives. Prime Minister Chr tien, for example, spearheaded the G8's support for the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) initiative, an important economic development initiative led by African states.⁵ The most notable policy innovation of this period was the concept of human security, which was successfully promoted by Canada and like-minded states as a new, more liberal conception of international security.⁶ Shifting the emphasis away from states and military threats towards the security and well-being of people and individuals, the human security agenda regarded economic development, human rights, and good governance as integral to local and global peace. This focus on human security informed Canada's support for peacekeeping in Africa, particularly the West Africa Peace and Security Initiative, intended to address small arms proliferation and encourage security co-operation among West African states. During Lloyd Axworthy's tenure as Foreign Minister, Canada also sponsored the International Commission on Intervention and State sovereignty (ICISS) and the idea of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and subsequently became one of the largest donors to the hybrid AU-UN mission in Darfur.⁷

The second period coincides with Stephen Harper's Conservative government from 2006 to 2015, when Canadian foreign policy rhetoric saw a noticeable shift away from Africa and the human security agenda. Although some major initiatives, such as the peacekeeping efforts in

⁴ Heather Smith and Claire Turenne Sj lander, *Canada in the World: Internationalism in Canadian Foreign Policy*. (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵ Edward Ansah Akuffo, "Beyond Apartheid: Moral Identity, FIPAs and NEPAD in Canada-South Africa Relations", *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 2013 51(2): 173-188.

⁶ See Lloyd Axworthy, "Canada and Human Security: The Need for Leadership", *International Journal* 1997 52(2):183-196.; Asteris Huliaras and Nikolaos Tzifakis, "Contextual Approaches to Human Security: Canada and Japan in the Balkans", *International Journal* 2007 62(3): 559-576.

⁷ David Black, "Out of Africa? The Harper Government's New 'Tilt' in the Developing World", *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 2009 15(2): 41-56; Black, *Canada and Africa in the New Millennium*.

Darfur, continued and Africa remained the largest recipient of Canadian aid, the Conservative government reduced the overall funding and engagement with the continent. The absorption of CIDA into the Department of Foreign Affairs in 2013 was widely interpreted as a shift away from a focus on development towards promoting Canadian commercial and national interests. The mining sector became a particular focus, and the decade from 2001 to 2011 saw Canadian assets and investments in African mining swell from \$2.9 billion to \$31.6 billion, with most of the increase coming after 2006.⁸ The primacy of Canadian economic and particularly extractive sector interests during this period was articulated in the 2011 strategy “Building the Canadian Advantage”, as well as a series of controversial partnership between mining companies and development-funded NGOs.

A third period can be dated to the Liberals’ return to power in October 2015, when the newly elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau proclaimed that “Canada is back” and ready to resume its compassionate and constructive role in the world.⁹ The Liberal government reasserted Canada’s commitments to development and peace and security, and in 2017 launched its feminist international assistance policy. This placed gender equality and empowerment of women and girls at the centre of its efforts to eradicate poverty and build a more peaceful, more inclusive, and more prosperous world.¹⁰ Despite the new rhetoric, much of the government’s policy in Africa and the Global South has been a repackaging and re-energising of previous initiatives and approaches focused on development, human rights, and peace.¹¹ As of 2023, Canada’s development policy is targeted to ten African countries; five in West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, and Senegal), three in East Africa (Ethiopia, Tanzania and South Sudan), and one each in Central and Southern Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique). The main objectives of these relationships continue to be the promotion of development, democracy, peace and security, and commercial and economic ties.¹² At present, Canada has diplomatic missions in 22 of Africa’s 54 countries, with a recent announcement of a new high commission in Rwanda and an observer mission to the AU.

The failure of successive Canadian governments to develop a cohesive and effective foreign policy towards Africa has led many to call for a deliberate, clear strategy and for a re-set of relations.¹³ In 2019, an internal memo to the Canadian ministers of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and International Development recognised that a “new vision of regional leadership is ... taking root, as African leaders are increasingly communicating their interests to the world in a more confident and unified voice.” According to the memo, “now is the time to re-envision Canada’s relationship with Sub-Saharan Africa” as “[the region’s] deepening

⁸ Black, *Canada and Africa in the New Millennium*, 151.

⁹ The National Post, [“We’re Back, Justin Trudeau says in Message to Canada’s Allies Abroad”](#), (20 October 2015).

¹⁰ Global Affairs Canada, [“Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy”](#), (2017).

¹¹ Edward Ansah Akuffo, “Morality as Organizing Principle: Making Sense of Canada–Africa Relations”. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Canada in International Affairs. Canada and International Affairs*, eds. R.W. Murray., P. Gecelovsky (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 635-660.

¹² Global Affairs Canada, [“Canada and Sub-Saharan Africa”](#), (2022).

¹³ See for example Senator Amina Gerba, “Canada Must Rebuild Its Ties to Africa”, [Senate of Canada](#), (6 June 2022); Neil Moss, “Canada Needs to Play a Larger Global Role after ‘Sluggish’ Response to COVID-19 IP Waiver, Says New South African Envoy”, [The Hill Times](#), (29 June 2022).

integration into the global economy, and its success in attracting new investment, underline the continent's rise as a more influential global player".¹⁴ Among African policymakers and intellectuals, there is also a widespread perception that Canada has been absent and has failed to deliver on its promises, especially after the return of the Liberal government in 2015. As one seasoned Africa-based observer of African politics and the AU put it in an interview for this report: "Canada has no profile in Africa." More generously, one AU official characterised Canada as "a large country that wants to be a small country". Others referred to Canada as "frugal" and as prioritising positive exposure for its initiatives rather than actual impact and long-term effectiveness.

The lack of a clear Africa policy was underlined by Canada's (second consecutive) failure to win a seat on the UN Security Council in 2020. With 54 members in the UN General Assembly, the vote of the African bloc is crucial in selecting the non-permanent members on the Security Council. In seeking Africa's support, Prime Minister Trudeau made a last-minute official visit to the continent, meeting with several leaders and attending a session of the African Union. Cabinet members also toured the continent. Nevertheless, Canada lost the seat to Norway and Ireland, two countries that have maintained consistent, long-standing relationships with the African continent. Norway has a dedicated mission to the AU and was frequently referred to in our research as having an exemplary partnership with the organisation, based on mutual respect and recognition. Similarly, the Irish government has emphasised the importance of Africa in its foreign policy, and in 2019 launched "Ireland's Strategy for Africa 2025" which sets out a range of objectives for development, trade, and co-operation with the continent.¹⁵

The announcement on 22 June 2022, that an engagement strategy for Africa will be presented to Cabinet is therefore a significant development, as is the opening of an observer mission at the AU. Although Canada is often perceived as absent from the continent, it is nevertheless generally well-regarded and has a good reputation among African policymakers. As frequently stated by both African and Canadian officials, Canada benefits from not having a colonial past on the continent and could leverage this to build stronger relationships based on trust and mutual respect. While this will require solid bilateral relations, Canada's capacity to engage individually with 54 countries is inevitably limited. This places the AU centre stage in an effective Africa policy. The decision to appoint a permanent representative to the AU is a clear recognition of this centrality. Until now, engagement with the AU has been the responsibility of Canada's ambassador to Ethiopia, who also handles diplomatic relations with Djibouti. The addition of a dedicated team to Canada-AU relations holds considerable promise and may help boost the organisation's ability to promote continental development and unity while simultaneously advancing Canadian foreign policy priorities.

¹⁴ Global Affairs Canada, "A Dynamic Partnership: Global Affairs Canada's Engagement with Sub-Saharan Africa", *Memorandum for Action Annex A*, (2019), 2-3. (Released under Access to Information request)

¹⁵ Department of Foreign Affairs, "[Global Ireland Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025 – DFA](#)", Government of Ireland, (2019).

Importantly, however, Canada's intention to strengthen its engagement with Africa will require significant investment not merely financially, but also in knowledge and expertise. As documented by a previous CIPS Policy Report, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) is seriously lacking in country and area expertise.¹⁶ This is especially the case when it comes to Africa. Given the relatively low priority accorded to the continent, particularly in recent decades, GAC is short on personnel with in-depth knowledge and sustained, long-term experience on the continent. Frequent personnel turn-over, short-term contracts, and a managerialist culture have devalued regional expertise as an attribute of leadership and route to promotion, and if a new Africa strategy is to be effective and meaningful it must be matched by a serious effort to cultivate a cadre of experts on Africa both in Ottawa and at Canada's embassies. As the CIPS report suggests, Canada's diverse population can facilitate this, but it will require "purposeful human resource policies and workforce strategic planning", as well as "a shift in corporate culture" within GAC.¹⁷

AFRICA AND THE CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER

Once dismissed as "The Hopeless Continent", Africa is increasingly recognised as a region of opportunity and growth. While poverty and conflict linger – and will require close attention and engagement – Africa is in rapid transformation both politically and economically. By 2050, one in every four humans will be African. Since 2000, about half of the fastest growing economies in the world have been in Africa.¹⁸ A surplus of labour power, greater political stability, and availability of information technology are transforming economies, making them more diverse and less dependent on extractive industries. Oil and mining now account for a minority of foreign direct investments, with more investors concentrating on telecommunications, retail, and services. Investment in financial technology companies, for example, reached a record high in 2021, and global venture capital is flowing at unprecedented levels.¹⁹ While Africa's growth and progress on poverty reduction are forecasted to slow in the coming years due to a combination of global economic pressures, including tightening global financial conditions and high inflation driven by rising food and fuel prices exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, many economies will nevertheless continue to expand, albeit it at a slower rate.²⁰

¹⁶ Ulric Shannon, "Competitive Expertise and Future Diplomacy: Subject-Matter Specialization in Generalists Foreign Ministries", [CIPS Policy Report](#) (August 2022).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸ Ari Rickman and Salih Booker, "The Future is African — and The United States Is Not Prepared" [The Washington Post](#) (6 June 2018).

¹⁹ UNCTAD, "Rethinking the Foundations of Export Diversification in Africa: The Catalytic Role of Business and Financial Services", [Economic Development in Africa Report 2022](#) (Geneva, 2022); EY Global, "Why Africa is Rising as a Bigger Player in the Global Economy", [EY](#) (11 September 2020) ; *The Economist*, "[Investing in Africa: Adventurous Capital](#)", (23 July 2022).

²⁰ International Monetary Fund, "[Regional Economic Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa](#)" (April 2022) ; The World Bank, "[The World Bank in Africa](#)", #AFRICACAN (13 April 2022); The World Bank, "[Africa Pulse: An Analysis of Issues Shaping African Economic Future](#)", Volume 26, (October 2022).

Politically and strategically, Africa's importance is also increasingly recognised. Africa is the world's second most populous continent. It is strategically located in proximity to most major ocean trade routes, bordering the Atlantic, the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden, and the Mediterranean Sea. Consisting of 54 countries, Africa makes up more than a quarter of the UN General Assembly and by custom it has three of the 15 non-permanent seats on the Security Council. For rising powers like China, Russia, and India, Africa is seen as a key potential partner in their vision for a multipolar, post-liberal world order. African countries, for their part, are keen to diversify their economic and political relations, and thus strengthen the continent's independence and global influence and stature.

As a result, Africa's commercial, political, and strategic ties with foreign governments and businesses have expanded at a phenomenal pace. From 2010 to 2016 more than 320 embassies were opened in Africa, probably the biggest embassy-building boom anywhere, at any time. Turkey alone opened 26, and India 18, taking its total to 47.²¹ India is now Africa's second largest trading partner, and the India-Africa Forum Summit indicates the centrality of the continent to India's foreign and defence policy. Africa's relations with India are, however, dwarfed by China, which is Africa's largest trading partner and bilateral creditor, as well as a crucial source of infrastructure investment. Fifty-three African states (all except Eswatini, which still recognises Taiwan) are members of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and military cooperation has expanded under the umbrella of the China-Africa Security Forum. China has opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti, and there is talk of a possible navy base in Equatorial Guinea on the Atlantic Coast. Numerous joint military exercises have been conducted across the continent, and China has developed an extensive network of military and security training programmes for African security professionals.²² The AU's headquarters in Addis Ababa was built by the Chinese government, free of charge, and the AU is a member of FOCAC and in February 2022 announced plans to open a permanent mission in Beijing, signalling its intent to further strengthen relations with China.

Africa-Russia relations have also expanded significantly, and Moscow's trade with the continent has doubled to about \$20 billion between 2015 and 2022.²³ Significantly Russia is now Africa's largest supplier of arms, accounting for nearly 50% of total arms export to the continent.²⁴ Between 2015 and 2019, Moscow signed 19 military collaboration agreements with African governments, many of them weak, authoritarian states in need of foreign support. The Wagner Group, a quasi-mercenary company with links to the Kremlin, is central to Russia's strategy and Wagner's soldiers have been deployed to several conflict zones, including the Central African Republic, Libya, Sudan, Mozambique, Mali, and Burkina Faso. In the latter two cases, Russian mercenaries and weapons appear to be filling the gap left by the withdrawal of French troops who have

²¹ The Economist, "[The New Scramble for Africa](#)" (7 March 2019); Christian Kurzydowski, "What Can India Offer Africa?", [The Diplomat](#), (27 June 2020).

²² See Lina Benabdullah, "China's Peace and Security Strategies in Africa: Building Capacity is Building Peace?", *African Studies Quarterly* 2016 16 (3-4): 17-34.

²³ Raluca Besliu, "Why Russia Finds Friends in Africa", [Green European Journal](#), (22 April 2022).

²⁴ Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova and Siemon T. Wezeman, "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2021", [SIPRI Fact Sheet](#), (March 2022), 7.

been fighting violent extremists in the region for nearly a decade. While Russia's military presence in Africa is expanding, it is miniscule compared to that of the US whose 6,000 troops operate from some 29 known military outposts across the continent.²⁵

The aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted Africa's geopolitical centrality. In the UN General Assembly, about half of the African members supported the initial resolution condemning Russia's aggression, while the others either abstained or absented themselves.²⁶ Subsequently, many African countries have sought to chart a path of non-alignment and neutrality, whereas others have sided more explicitly with either Russia or the West. For their part, Russia, China, and Western countries have stepped up their diplomatic competition for African friends and allies, with a succession of high-level delegations visiting the continent. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov toured Uganda, the Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Egypt in July 2022, seeking to counter allegations that Russia is responsible for Africa's growing food insecurity. Lavrov's tour overlapped with President Emmanuel Macron's visit to Cameroon, Benin, and Guinea-Bissau, where he sought not only to reset France's relationship with Africa but also garner support for Europe's stance against Russia. Just days later, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken embarked on a tour of South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Rwanda. In January 2023 Lavrov returned for a visit to Angola, Eritrea, Eswatini, and South Africa, followed hot on the heels by Janet Yellen, the US Treasury Secretary, whose continental tour included South Africa, Senegal, and Zambia. While US trade, diplomatic, and military cooperation with South Africa far outstrips that of Russia, Foreign Minister Lavrov nevertheless received his counter-part's assurances that South Africa would work with Russia and China in their efforts to create "a redesigned global order".²⁷ South Africa is hosting the BRICS summit in August 2023, and has indicated its intention to expand the bloc's membership to strengthen its global influence and challenge the dominance of Western powers.

Geopolitical competition also set the tone for the Biden administration's strategy for sub-Saharan Africa, which was launched by Secretary of State Blinken during his visit to South Africa.²⁸ The strategy is a significant shift from the US's traditional approach to Africa, promising a new partnership approach that recognises that "Sub-Saharan Africa's governments, institutions, and people will play a crucial role in solving global challenges." It also emphasises the need to "listen" and "consult" with a broad range of partners, thus acknowledging Africa's own agency and agenda in global politics – and by implication indicating a less patronising, top-down approach. At the same time, the strategy is clearly framed with reference to the current geopolitical environment. China, the strategy asserts, "sees the region as an important arena to challenge the rules-based international order",

²⁵ See Nick Turse, "Pentagon's Own Maps of US Bases in Africa Contradict Its Claim of 'Light' Footprint", *The Intercept* (27 February 2020).

²⁶ Mahama Tawat, "Russia-Ukraine: Decoding How African Countries Voted at the UN", *The Conversation* (8 March 2022).

²⁷ Geoffrey York, "South Africa to Side with Russian on Push for Redesigned Global Order", *Globe and Mail* (23 January 2023).

²⁸ United States Government, "[U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa](#)" (August 2022).

whereas Russia uses its “economic and security ties to undercut Africans’ principled opposition to Russia’s further invasion of Ukraine and related human rights abuses.”²⁹

This competitive geopolitical climate offers both challenges and opportunities for Africa. It also sets the context and parameters for Canada’s engagement with the continent. For Africa, the multiplicity of possible partners offers potential leverage and greater bargaining power, but also risks undermining continental unity and perpetuating weakness as individual countries choose sides in exchange for material support, including food aid and military assistance. This was the fate of Africa during the Cold War, as predicted by Kwame Nkrumah’s dire warning that without unity African countries would forever be pawns of the great powers.³⁰ Today, this makes the AU central to Africa’s ability to navigate the changing world order, and to improve its position and influence within a future order. Canada’s Africa strategy must take careful account of these heightened geopolitical tensions, as well as the complex array of interests and motivations among African governments and institutions, and avoid treating the continent as a pawn in a larger strategic game.

THE AFRICAN UNION AT 20

When the AU was launched in Durban in 2002, it replaced the Organisation of African Unity, (OAU) which by then had come to be seen by many as an outdated talking shop for dictators, or slightly more benevolently, an exclusive president’s club. Inspired by Pan-Africanism, the AU has embarked on an ambitious new agenda for continental integration and sought to create an Africa that is a “strong, united and influential global player”.³¹ Thabo Mbeki, former South African president and one of the architects of the AU, promised “a continent of democracy” in which “people participate and the rule of law is upheld”.³²

Twenty years later, much has been achieved. With 55 member states, the AU is the largest regional organisation in the world. It is also one of the most institutionally developed multilateral organisations, second only to the EU. The AU has strongly endorsed democracy and human rights, and it has spearheaded the principle of “non-indifference” towards war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. It has developed a strong peace and security architecture and has strengthened its contribution to peacekeeping. As part of this, the AU sent African troops to stop genocide in Darfur and established a mission to combat a jihadist insurgency in Somalia. The AU has also been a leading actor in conflict mediation, often through high-ranking diplomats and former heads of state, as in the recent civil war in Ethiopia. The institutional reforms spearheaded by Rwandan President Paul Kagame between 2016 and 2018 have made the AU leaner and more focused. After years of preparation, the African Continent Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) came into effect in January 2021, creating the largest free trade area in the world. Ratified by 43 states, AfCFTA has the potential to boost economic growth and speed up Africa’s post-pandemic recovery. The AU

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁰ Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (New York: Praeger, 1963).

³¹ African Union, [“Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want”](#), (September 2015).

³² Thabo Mbeki, [“Speech at the Launch of the African Union”](#) (9 July 2002).

has also been praised for its effective and collaborative handling of COVID-19 and has played a key role in developing the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention from a specialised technical institution to a public health agency with regional collaboration centres.

The AU has actively sought to strengthen Africa's position and influence on the world stage, increasingly presenting a more united continental voice on key global issues. The establishment of a permanent AU mission to the UN has played a key role in this regard, coordinating between member states and the continent's three elected members of the Security Council (UNSC), the so-called "A3". In 2019, the A3 delivered 16 joint statements in the UNSC during both country-specific and thematic debates, an indication of the unity of its members.³³ The establishment of AU permanent representations at the European Union (EU) in Brussels; the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Geneva; the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) states in Brussels; the League of Arab States in Cairo; and the Organisation of American States in Washington has also contributed significantly to the continent's ability to participate and shape international debates. The AU has also developed several so-called Common African Positions (CAPs) on issues of crucial relevance to the continent. Most well-known is the Ezulwini Common African Position on UN Reform (the so-called Ezulwini Consensus), which calls for reform of the UNSC and the allocation of two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats to the continent, whereas the CAP on the Post-2015 Development Agenda was highly influential in determining the Sustainable Development Goals.³⁴

Such achievements aside, challenges abound. *The Economist* commented on the AU's anniversary under the headline "Older and Less Wise", suggesting that the organisation is less effective at 20 than it was at two.³⁵ The AU's ability and willingness to enforce democratic governance and norms have declined, and it has proved inactive and ineffective in the face of several unconstitutional regime changes in recent years. According to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the continent today is "less safe, secure and democratic" than a decade ago.³⁶ The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which was set up to monitor member states' performance on good governance, is itself being audited following accusations of bad governance and financial malpractice. Earlier optimism that the military coup d'état had disappeared from the continent, thanks in part to the AU's strong anti-coup norm, has faded as civilian governments have been disposed in a succession of coups in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Sudan. In particular, the AU's failure to expel Chad when the son of President Idriss Déby seized power after his father's death is widely perceived as setting a dangerous precedent and indicating a retreat from the norm mandating the suspension of a member state after a coup. The Union's ambition to "Silence the Guns" seems further away than ever, as conflicts and extremist violence continue across the Sahel, Nigeria, Somalia, the DRC,

³³ Gustavo de Carvalho and Daniel Forti, "How Can African States Become More Influential in the UN Security Council?", [IPI Global Observatory](#), (12 March 2020).

³⁴ Bankole Adeoye, "Common African Positions on Global Issues: Achievements and Realities", Institute of Security Studies, [Africa Report 30](#) (December 2020), 5, 6.

³⁵ The Economist, "[Older and Less Wise](#)" (12 February 2022).

³⁶ Mo Ibrahim Foundation, "[2022 Ibrahim Index of Africa Governance](#)"

Mozambique, and Cameroun. At the Malabo Summit on terrorism and unconstitutional changes of government in Africa in 2022, the Chairperson of the Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, admitted disappointment: "... terrorism is not weakening on the continent ... because of the failure to honour our own commitments"³⁷

A main reason for the AU's failure to live up to its promises is the overwhelming influence of the Heads of State Assembly, which as currently constituted can – and does – override the executive, legislative, and legal organs of the AU. Indeed, there may be many within the AU Assembly of Heads of State that ultimately do not want a functional supranational body that empowers citizens, that has the potential to hold leaders to account, and that may intervene to protect their citizens. In the most damning of anniversary commentaries, the AU has become another version of the OAU; a talking shop where too often sovereignty and realpolitik trump the principled commitment to non-indifference.

Another perennial challenge is financial. Of a total budget of only US\$650 million – 260 times smaller than that of the EU – approximately 60 percent comes from foreign donors, particularly the EU and individual European states. This over-reliance on external partners in the funding of projects and initiatives ultimately undermines the Union's decision-making capacity and autonomy. As a remedy, the AU has since 2016 insisted on a 0.2 percent tax on all eligible goods imported into the continent, but only 17 states have implemented the levy and only about 40 percent of member states pay their union dues.³⁸

Nevertheless, the AU is a decisive driving force for the political and economic development and integration of Africa. Its vision for Africa's future is set out in *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. Adopted by member states in 2013, it is the continent's strategic plan for transforming Africa "into a global powerhouse of the future". The *Agenda* has seven key aspirations:

1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.
2. An integrated continent, politically united, based on ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa's renaissance.
3. An Africa of good governance, democracy and respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law.
4. A peaceful and secure Africa.
5. An Africa with strong cultural identity, common heritage, values, and ethics.
6. An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.
7. Africa as a strong, united, resilient, and influential global player.

³⁷ African Union, "[Speech of H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union to the 16th Extraordinary Session of the African Union on Terrorism and Unconstitutional Change of Government in Africa](#)", (Malabo, Republic of Equatorial Guinea, 28 May 2022).

³⁸ African Union, "[Financing the Union: Towards the Financial Autonomy of the African Union](#)"; African Union, "[African Union sustainable funding strategy gains momentum](#)" (23 August 2022).

Aspiration 7 emphasises the importance of African unity and solidarity “in the face of external interference, including attempts to divide the continent and undue pressure and sanctions on some countries”. A central objective is to improve Africa’s place in the global governance system, and to this effect the AU is renewing its approach to international partnerships seeking to “acquire support to... obtain the global leverage that would enable the continent to maximise its impact on the world scene”.³⁹ Recognising that past approaches to cooperation have often been “donor driven” and “skewed in favor of the donors”, the AU’s new partnership strategy seeks to tailor partnerships to the needs of Africa, as well as the partners’ comparative advantage⁴⁰

Canada’s new partnership with the AU must be guided by the strategic vision outlined in *Agenda 2063*, while simultaneously taking account of Canada’s own interests, values, and foreign policy priorities.

CANADA – AU: STRATEGIC AREAS OF COOPERATION

Global Affairs Canada’s most recent mandates have emphasised the continued importance of the rules-based international order, as well as the centrality of democracy and human rights to Canada’s international engagement. Another key component is Canada’s feminist foreign policy, particularly in development, peace, and security initiatives. Many of the same values and priorities are shared by the AU and are reflected in its statutes and strategic plans, including *Agenda 2063*. While these values and principles may not always be reflected in the AU’s actions, let alone enforced by heads of states, the AU Commission considers “liberal values the foundation of its work”.⁴¹ The language of democracy, human rights, and gender equality is thus a shared language where Canada and the AU can find common ground, and where Canada can strengthen the ability of the AU to act as a norm entrepreneur that helps nudge states towards greater democracy and equality.

Two interrelated principles should guide Canada’s relationship with the AU. First, Canada must avoid contributing to the escalation of geopolitical rivalry on the continent. Canada’s engagement must be fully cognisant of the current geopolitical environment and Africa’s position within it, including its sense of historical injustices and inequalities within the international system. Canada must therefore avoid approaching the AU partnership as part of a larger geopolitical struggle. Talk of “friend-shoring” might be unhelpful in this regard and risks alienating the AU and its member states. In the current climate any indication of pressure to support “the West” is likely to be interpreted as a continuation of Western domination. Second, the relationship must be built on mutual respect, even when there is a difference of opinion and interests. This

³⁹ African Union, “[Africa’s Strategic Partnership with Other Parts of the World](#)” (2022).

⁴⁰ Institute for Security Studies (ISS), “How to Rationalise Africa’s Many Partnerships?”, [PSC Report](#) (13 December 2019); Philomena Apiko, “Getting Partnerships Right: The Case for an AU Strategy”, Discussion Paper 313, [EDCMP](#), (November 2021).

⁴¹ Thomas Kwasi Tieku, “The African Union: Successes and Failures”, [Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics](#), (2019).

does not mean that Canada's should abandon its values of democracy and human rights, but it should not preach from a presumed moral high ground but instead engage and seek to identify shared interests, values, and vulnerabilities. Here Canada can take a leaf from the Biden administration's Africa strategy, which states that "Even when we have disagreements, we will lean in, agree to meet, and address differences head-on."⁴²

In terms of practice and implementation, Canada's engagement with the AU must be focused and targeted in order to break with the legacy of policy inconsistency. Canada must decide how best to maximise its impact, rather than seek to do a (little) bit of everything. Our suggested areas of strategic cooperation below are thus intended as options on a menu, not an inclusive to-do-list. With limited resources, Canada should build on its comparative advantages and align with the AU's priorities to achieve a mutually rewarding partnership.

Peace and Security

Canada has a long history of contributing to peacekeeping and the promotion of peace and security in Africa, and the AU is actively seeking support for its efforts to "silence the guns". This makes peace and security a logical focus of cooperation. Canada retains a positive reputation as an early leader in the field of human security and could build on this reputation by strengthening its contributions. At the conclusion of the first high-level dialogue with the AU Commission in October 2022, GAC announced that \$37 million will be allocated for peace and security initiatives.⁴³ This is a good start.

Canada's contributions to peacekeeping are, however, at a record low, both in terms of personnel and intellectual and political leadership.⁴⁴ To recapture its standing in this field will require concerted effort and investment, not only financially but also in terms of time and expertise. The Elsie Initiative to increase the meaningful participation of women in UN peacekeeping, as well as the Vancouver Principles on the prevention of child soldiering, are positive steps in this direction, but will require sustained resource commitments. Through close dialogue with the AU, Canada should work to support AU initiatives and priorities to find "African solutions to African problems". This might include a continuation of activities such as the training of military and police officers for peacekeeping operations, including re-orienting or expanding bilateral relationships towards AU operations. Canada should also work to ensure predictable, sustainable, and flexible financing for AU-led peace support operations, including through the use of UN-assessed contributions. As peace-support operations have become increasingly dangerous and Western countries, including Canada, have refrained from committing boots on the ground, it is paramount that African militaries are adequately supported, trained, and equipped to undertake such missions. It is also important to recognise that Canada has much to learn from the now extensive experience of African peacekeepers.

⁴² United States Government, *U.S. Strategy*, 12.

⁴³ Government of Canada, "[Canada and African Union Commission Conclude First High-Level Dialogue](#)" (28 October 2022).

⁴⁴ Walter Dorn, "Tracking the Promises: Canada's Contributions to Peacekeeping", [WalterDorn.net](https://www.walterdorn.net)

As a bilingual country with no colonial baggage in Africa, Canada is particularly well positioned to contribute to peace and security in Francophone countries. As geopolitical tensions have complicated France's relationship with its former colonies, Canada could partner with the AU to play a more prominent role in promoting peace and security in countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Cameroun. This could include stepping up its mediation and track-two diplomacy efforts, a policy area where Canada in the past had considerable expertise and that was identified as a priority in the mandate letter to the Trudeau government's first foreign minister.⁴⁵ The AU itself has considerable mediation capacity, including a Mediation and Dialogue Division located within the Political Affairs, Peace, and Security Department, and productive partnerships can be built to further preventative diplomacy and conflict prevention on the continent. This might include Canadian sponsorship of quiet, long-term unofficial mediation efforts, where the stakes are particularly high. Canada could also play a leading role in diversifying the pool of mediators, especially by contributing to the training of women mediators. Support for strengthening the capacity of FemWise (The Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation), which is part of the AU's Peace and Security Architecture, is one such option that corresponds well with Canada's feminist foreign policy objectives.

Women Empowerment and Gender Equality

Canada's approach to Africa is guided by its feminist foreign policy and feminist international assistance policy to promote gender equality and support women and girls as agents of change, as a means to help build a prosperous, integrated, inclusive, and peaceful continent.⁴⁶ The AU similarly has a strong commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, as evident in *Agenda 2063*, which reiterates the organisation's commitment to resolve and end violence against women and girls and improve their access to and control of finances, education, health, and land. Women and girls represent about half of the continent's total population and the attainment of women's empowerment is a critical factor in building an inclusive, prosperous, and peaceful Africa.⁴⁷

Such convergence and agreement aside, the issues of women's empowerment and gender rights are far from straight forward for the Canada-AU relationship. There is a considerable gap between AU's normative endorsement of gender equality and the policies and practices of many of its member states, especially regarding abortion, sexual and reproductive health, and LGBTQ+ rights. Promoting a feminist foreign policy will therefore require considerable diplomatic skills and flexibility. By supporting the institutionalisation of feminist norms at the AU, Canada can potentially help strengthen the organisation's ability to act as a norm entrepreneur within member states. The Women, Gender, Development, and Youth Directorate is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the AU's Strategy on Gender

⁴⁵ Peter Jones, "Middle Power Liberal Internationalism and Mediation in Messy Places: The Canadian Dilemma", *International Journal* 2019 74(1):119-134. Recent announcements of possible mediation efforts in Cameroun may indicate a return to this foreign policy priority, but also underline the diplomatic and political complexities involved.

⁴⁶ Global Affairs Canada, "[Results Around the World-Pan Africa Regional Development](#)", (2018).

⁴⁷ African Union, "[On the Road to an Inclusive Africa With Empowered Citizens...](#)", (16 June 2021).

Equality and Women's Empowerment, and Canada could seek to deepen its cooperation with this Directorate.

Canada must also recognise that gender equality and women's empowerment are no longer – if they ever were – “soft” foreign policy issues but have become an intrinsic part of broader geopolitical culture wars. Conservative, nationalist, and populist movements and NGOs are purposefully working to prevent the global promotion of liberal family values and gender equality, especially by multilateral institutions like the UN. African countries are key players in these conservative coalitions, including the World Congress of Families and C-Fam, and have contributed to a backlash against the promotion of feminist notions of gender and women's rights at the UN.⁴⁸ In implementing its feminist foreign policy, Canada must therefore be pragmatic and attuned to its possible geopolitical divisiveness. This will require working not only with like-minded countries, but also engaging strategically at the ideological and political level within the AU and the UN.

Cooperation at the United Nations

Both Canada and the AU regard the UN as central to multilateral cooperation and the future of world order and stability. This makes the UN a crucial venue for collaboration on issues of common interest. The AU has an observer mission at the UN and is actively seeking to coordinate a strong, united African voice in the General Assembly and the Security Council. Through targeted partnerships and liaisons with the AU mission, Canada could help realise the AU's ambition to make Africa a more influential global player while simultaneously pursuing its own agenda at the UN. This could be achieved by acting as joint sponsors, or “penholders”, of resolutions on issues of importance to both parties, including for example sustainable development and climate change.

Canada should also take a clear supportive position on the AU's demand for reform of the UNSC. The current composition of the Security Council reflects the balance of international power in 1945, when African countries were still under colonial rule. The Ezulwini Consensus, adopted by the AU in 2005, calls for the expansion of the UNSC to provide Africa with a voice commensurate with its size and significance in the world.⁴⁹ The blueprint proposes the expansion of the Security Council from 15 to 26 members, with two permanent seats for Africa, and five non-permanent seats for each of the continent's sub-regions – north, south, east, west, and central.

Several countries, including the US, France, and Germany, have recently stated their support for Africa's demand for two permanent seats at the UNSC, underlining the extent to which its current composition is badly outdated. On his January tour of Africa, Russia's Foreign

⁴⁸ See Rita Abrahamsen, “The Right Family: The Personal is Geopolitical”, [CIPS Blog](#) (December 14, 2020); Jelena Cupač and Irem Ebetürk, “Backlash Advocacy and NGO Polarization over Women's Rights in the United Nations”, *International Affairs* 2021 97(4): 1183–1201.

⁴⁹ African Union, “[The Common African Position on the Proposed Reform of the United Nations: ‘The Ezulwini Consensus’](#)” (March 2005).

Minister also voiced strong support for UNSC reform to accommodate African, Asian, and Latin American countries. As a member of the “Uniting for Consensus” group, Canada is a long-standing supporter of an expanded Security Council but opposes giving new members veto power.⁵⁰ The Ezulwini Consensus is opposed, in principle, to the veto, but argues that as long as it exists for the five permanent members (P5) it should be accorded to all permanent members. It is easy to dismiss Africa’s demands for reform of the UNSC as unrealistic, and to hide behind the insurmountable obstacles of bureaucratic inertia and the complexities of the veto. The fact remains, however, that the UNSC is perceived as hopelessly outdated and unfair by most countries in the global South. This makes reform crucial to any strategy that seeks to safeguard multilateral cooperation within an effective, rules-based international order. While the exact nature and extent of such reforms will inevitably be the subject of prolonged and intense negotiations, Canada should signal its clear intent to support Africa and the AU in this endeavour towards a more just, inclusive, and democratic United Nations.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Africa is one of the fastest growing economic regions in the world. Despite global economic turmoil and the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the continent is set to experience continued growth in the years ahead. The launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in January 2021 has the potential to significantly boost Africa’s GDP, possibly by as much 7 percent by 2035, according to the World Bank.⁵¹ The success of the AfCFTA, however, will depend on political cooperation and will require significant work to remove and reduce tariffs on goods and services, streamline customs procedures, harmonise regulatory measures and standards, etc. To this end, Canada should continue, and possibly expand, its technical support and assistance to AfCFTA. Canada has extensive expertise in the area of trade negotiations, and this experience could be leveraged to ensure more rapid progress towards a fully integrated African free trade area.

Canada is committed to diversify its trading relations, and the African continent offers multiple untapped opportunities. The AU is similarly keen to build and diversify the continent’s international economic partnerships, based on mutual benefits. Canada should therefore develop a strategy for economic cooperation with Africa, as announced in 2021.⁵² Expanding trade with the continent will not only support Africa’s economic development, but also help Canada achieve its goal of trade diversification.

The African Diaspora and People-to-People Diplomacy

As a country of immigrants, Canada is home to a significant African diaspora that represents an untapped opportunity for enhanced cooperation with the AU. According to Global Affairs

⁵⁰ United Nations, [“‘Uniting for Consensus Group’ of States Introduces Text on Security Council Reform...”](#), Press Release, (26 July 2005).

⁵¹ World Bank, [“Free Trade Deal Boosts Africa’s Economic Development”](#), (30 June 2022).

⁵² Government of Canada, [“Minister Ng Announces Virtual Trade Mission to Africa for Women-Owned and Led Businesses”](#), (2 February 2022).

Canada, the sub-Saharan African diaspora in 2019 counted nearly half a million people.⁵³ This included over 30 000 African students studying in Canada. GAC has identified this group of people as a possible point of contact for strengthening the partnership with sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁴ The AU has designated the African diaspora as the continent's sixth region, and the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) seeks to encourage the diaspora to participate in the development and integration of the African continent.⁵⁵

While recognising the crucial role that the African diaspora can play in deepening relations with the AU, GAC has yet to find productive ways of capitalising on the strength of existing people-to-people relations and mobilize new networks. Significant gains can be realised through creative initiatives to improve diaspora engagement, including strengthening economic cooperation and promoting mutual understanding. Many members of the African diaspora maintain close relationships with the continent, and many are well educated and eager to contribute. Given the shortage of personnel and expertise at the AU, Canada should explore opportunities for secondment programmes of diaspora experts to assist with defined priority areas. Diaspora experts have the advantage of cultural and language expertise and could provide crucial skills transfer to AU at a time when such assistance is in high demand.

CONCLUSION

Canada's intention to develop its first Africa engagement strategy follows a prolonged period of relative neglect, during which time other countries have increased their economic, political, and strategic involvement with the continent. To rebuild its presence and reputation, Canada will need to be consistently and respectfully engaged to establish itself as a serious partner.

As Canada's ability to develop bilateral relationship with 54 different states will inevitably be limited, the AU, as the continent's regional body, should occupy a central position Canada's Africa policy. By pursuing strategic partnerships with the AU, Canada can maximise its impact and at the same time strengthen African integration and the AU's capacity to act as a norm entrepreneur on the continent and as an influential player on the global stage.

While Canada has in the past tended to approach Africa from the perspective of humanitarianism and development, this is increasingly an outdated approach. Today's Africa is home to some of the fastest growing economies in the world and wields significant political power within global affairs. Canada's future partnership with the AU must build on strategic areas of convergence, mutual interests, and shared values, drawing on Canada's comparative advantages and the AU's priorities.

⁵³ Global Affairs Canada, "A Dynamic Partnership: Global Affairs Canada's Engagement with Sub-Saharan Africa", (2019), 3. (Released under the Access to Information request).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁵ African Union, "[The Diaspora Division](#)", *Citizens and Diaspora Organizations (CIDO) Fact Sheet* (2022)

Finally, at a time when the rules-based international order is under threat, Canada should look beyond its traditional allies in the West and seek to engage the AU as a serious partner in the effort to strengthen, reform, and improve multilateral cooperation. This is not only an opportunity for Canada to act as a ‘good international citizen’, but also a strategic policy option that is firmly in the country’s national interest as a middle power.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), grant number 611-2021-0196, and from the Alex Trebek Forum for Dialogue’s support for the project *Changing Orders: Shaping the Future and Securing Rights in a World in Transformation*. In preparation of the report, we benefitted from the insights and comments of numerous individuals from the African Union, Global Affairs Canada, diplomatic representatives to the AU, as well as academic experts in Canada, Africa, and beyond. We are grateful for their time and inputs, although all views expressed are ours. We also gratefully acknowledge the research support of Dr. Farai Chipato and Ms. Bucky Badejo.