



The G8 and Everyone Else

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On the morning of June 26, in Kananaskis, Canada, the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK and the USA-the 'Group of Eight'-will begin a one-and-one-half-day summit. After a brief meeting of the old G7 (the G8 excluding Russia), the eight leaders and their entourages will meet from lunch on Wednesday until lunch on Thursday. The EU will also be represented, through Spanish prime minister Jose Maria Aznar, the current president of the European Council, and Romano Prodi, the president of the European Commission. The ten men will discuss the state of the global economy, the progress of the war on terrorism, and a new development partnership with Africa.

These facts, everyone agrees on. Beyond the basics, however, the Kananaskis G8 summit is many things to many people.

For those involved in G8 governments, Kananaskis is the culmination of a long series of discussions, mostly held behind closed doors. Since February, separate summits have already been conducted between G8 environment ministers, labour ministers, energy ministers, justice ministers and foreign ministers. G7 finance ministers have met three times. The nine G8 'sherpas', individuals appointed by each of the G8 leaders and the European Commission to take charge of their summit work, have held a series of meetings to prepare the ground for the summit. Some sherpas have also conducted discussions with representatives of their countries' civil society organizations.

For this year's summit, Personal Representatives for Africa have been appointed by each G8 country. In charge of producing the G8 Africa Action Plan (see below), these individuals and their supporting casts have met six times since October. Five meetings have also been held between G8 officials and the architects of the New Partnership for African Development, or NEPAD (see below).



All of these meetings have already produced a series of documents and communiques with the G8 stamp, from prominent plans such as the G8 Initiative on Conflict and Development and the G8 Recommendations on Counter-Terrorism, to the more obscure G8 Statement on Data Protection Regimes. The G8, it seems, is not just a one-off summit, but a continuous process of policy negotiation between the world's most powerful countries.

For many African leaders, the Kananaskis summit is an opportunity to transform the relationship between the G8 and Africa. At its 2001 summit in Genoa, Italy, the G8 agreed to draft an Africa Action Plan that would reshape the G8's role in African development. This action plan, to be discussed and approved in Kananaskis, will be based on the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a document drafted by five African leaders, largely behind closed doors. NEPAD proposes that African countries will create 'trustworthy' conditions of good governance and stability, and asks the developed world to respond with increased aid, trade and private investment.

Notwithstanding the large number of previous failed initiatives, some observers feel that NEPAD is the document that will put Africa on the road to sustainable development. Others are less enthusiastic (see Tuesday's article). The second day of the G8 summit has been set aside for discussion of NEPAD and the Africa Action Plan, and the presidents of Nigeria, South Africa, Algeria and Senegal have been invited to the proceedings, along with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. For their part, G8 leaders have assigned some political heavyweights to draft the Africa Action Plan, from Robert Fowler, a former Canadian ambassador to the United Nations, to, more distressingly, Michel Camdessus, former Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund and a major architect of its much-criticized structural adjustment programmes.

African leaders are confident that they will be taking home more than just the official summit photo. It remains to be seen, however, whether high expectations for the Africa Action Plan will be translated into significant G8 commitments.

For local residents faced with a meeting they did not ask for, the G8 summit means unprecedented security measures-US\$300 million worth. Kananaskis, a wilderness area near the city of Calgary, was selected as the summit site for its remoteness, and thus lack of easy access for protesters.

A huge military and police presence in the forest has cordoned off a 6.5-km zone around the isolated hotel hosting the summit, protecting against terrorism as well as enterprising anti-G8 activists. Many locals are unhappy about both the potential impact of the summit on Kananaskis' environment, and the readiness of the military to use 'lethal force' against anyone entering the no-go zone.



The stringent security arrangements extend to Calgary, where concern in local media about potential violent protests has sometimes verged on paranoia. Police have been authorised to take strict measures to keep public order, up to and including jamming of cellular phones in the area if required. Most locals hope that none of these measures will be necessary.

For those opposed to G8 policies, the summit is an exercise in antidemocratic decision-making. It is also an opportunity to call attention to alternative ideas through meetings and protests, as the international media looks on. Anti-G8 activists are a diverse set of groups with widely differing agendas and tactics, and the week of the G8 summit will see a varied menu of protest events. With events in Kananaskis ruled out by logistics and the huge military presence, Calgary and Ottawa have become the focus of anti-G8 activities.

The most prominent anti-G8 meeting is the Group of Six Billion People's Summit (G6B), named for the number of the world's population not present at Kananaskis. The conference features an impressive list of speakers, mostly from non-governmental organizations. The G6B seeks to provide alternatives to the policies of the G8 countries, and will submit a list of recommended actions to the G8 in advance of the Kananaskis summit (see Wednesday's article).

A popular and peaceful community march and a pro-bicycle, anti-car Critical Mass Ride were the first of the major Calgary-based protest activities. During the week of the G8 summit, events will vary from a Revolutionary Knitting Circle, opposing G8 policies through needlecraft, to the Showdown at the Hoedown, countering a VIP event for G8 delegates with a street party. Notably, the Showdown and most other activities are advertised as non-violent. This is not to say that violence is out of the question; to the regret of many activists, the organizers of the J26 March planned for the first day of the G8 summit say that 'all tactics are welcome' at the event. Meanwhile, a few protesters plan to blockade delegates' motorcades in Kananaskis itself.

Activists have faced an uphill battle in anti-G8 organization. The major focus of protests was to have been a Solidarity Village, or mass campground for activists, but the Calgary city council did not grant a permit for use of municipal land. Fifty-eight of the sixty delegates invited from developing countries by the organizers of the G6B were refused visas to enter Canada. Some other activists coming to Calgary or Ottawa fell victim to 'protester profiling' at the Canada-US border, and were kept out of the country. Volunteer legal advisers, civil liberties observers and street medics are on standby for whatever comes next.



This is the first in a series of five articles on the June 26-27, 2002 G8 summit in Kananaskis, Canada. These daily reports are sent from nearby Calgary, the focal point for media activity and anti-G8 meetings and protests.

In future articles:

Tuesday, a closer look at the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the basis for the G8's upcoming Africa Action Plan. Is NEPAD, as many claim, the plan that will save Africa?

Wednesday, as the Group of Eight begins its meeting in Kananaskis, the Group of Six Billion People's Summit will have wrapped up in Calgary. What alternatives to G8 policies will the G6B propose?

Thursday, on the second and last day of the G8 summit, its agenda will turn to Africa. What will the G8 and its opponents have said and done during the summit's first day?

Friday, in the aftermath of the summit and the protests, politicians, bureaucrats and activists will be taking stock of the results. So will African leaders; will the G8's Africa Action Plan meet their expectations?