

Embracing Africa once again . . .
Blog by Her Excellency Michaëlle Jean,
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In 2006, when I undertook State visits to five African countries—Algeria, Mali, Ghana, South Africa and Morocco—as my first trip to the continent, I called it and treated it like a journey of hope. I wanted to assess the strengths and see the vigour of civil society, and to identify African solutions to the challenges the continent is facing. When I went back a second time, at the invitation of Africa’s first female elected president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, to take part in the international colloquium she organized in her country, Liberia, on women’s empowerment, leadership development, international peace and security, I was once again able to add Canada’s voice to this deep reflection and in support of the work of hundreds of African organizations.

I am looking forward to renewing my dialogue with the women, men and youth of Africa, which is the cradle of humanity, yet has been so cruelly mistreated by history. I will be there as a number of countries celebrate the 50th anniversary of their independence after decades of colonization. Political autonomy, successful identity and cultural recovery—Africa is now being urged to lead a new revolution that is social, economic and democratic in nature. Social revolution: because the dream is to see the people escape their daily miseries, endemic poverty, epidemics, illiteracy, insecurity and conflicts. Economic revolution: for an economy that works for the greater good, for human and sustainable development that makes education and training a priority; a fairer economy that will put an end to the abusive exploitation of resources and labour, and further attract responsible investment; an economy that favours all forms of co-operation that could help African countries enter international markets in a more competitive way. Democratic revolution: in the spirit of good governance—inclusive, transparent, responsible—and of the state of law, which guarantees justice and security for all, as well as political alternation.

Four African countries, from April 14 to 24

Accompanied by a delegation that is representative of Canadian civil society, I will first be welcomed in Senegal by President Abdoulaye Wade and several other representatives from national Senegalese institutions with whom I will have bilateral discussions. In order to pursue a “diplomatie de proximité” and increase the number of points of view, I will also meet with students at Cheikh Anta Diop University and women’s organizations that receive Canadian funding for microcredit. We have also organized an *Art Matters* forum with artists, as culture is considered a beacon in Senegal.

I will leave Dakar for Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), at the invitation of President Joseph Kabila Kabange, and I will have the distinguished

honour of speaking at the Palais du Peuple before the members of the National Assembly and Senate. I will focus on the situation of Congolese women, and their needs in terms of health and security. I will have the opportunity to meet with representatives from a number of women's organizations in Kinshasa at the N'Galiema health centre, which trains midwife nurses who also specialize in postnatal care, as the mortality rate of mothers in childbirth and of newborns is dramatically high. Then to Goma, where I will visit the HEAL Africa centre (Health-Education-Action-Leadership), which helps the women and girls who are the victims of the terrible plague of sexual violence in that region. These projects have been supported by Canadian organizations for years. As commander-in-chief of Canada, I will meet with members of the United Nations Organization Mission in DR Congo (MONUC), in which Canada participates, to discuss the deadly attacks that are devastating the Great Lakes communities.

I will arrive in the DRC's neighbouring country, Rwanda, during the month they mourn and remember the 1994 genocide, which left over 800 000 people dead. While there, I will honour the victims and visit the commemorative sites at Gisozi and Butare. Memory and reconciliation to better live together and build peace will be central to the discussions during all my meetings, the bilateral ones as well as those with NGOs and the people. The President of the Republic of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, would like to show me where his country is today, and how it is being reborn from the ashes of the very worst of humanity. Rwanda is a world leader in terms of gender equality: 50% of its parliamentarians are women and they hold key positions in the government. It goes without saying that women are key to Africa's future.

On our way back to Canada from Rwanda, we will stop in Cape Verde. Like his fellow citizens, Cape Verdean President Pedro Verona Rodrigues Pires wants to strengthen existing bonds and create new economic and cultural co-operation ties with Canada. On the Island of Sal, I will have the opportunity to meet with decision makers and representatives from organizations, like the Valorizar Sal NGO, which work for solidarity, education and public-spiritedness.

Every day, the Canadian delegates will write about our meetings and their impressions during this new "journey of hope". I invite you to join in on our discussions using all the new media platforms.