

Introduction

Accountability, Innovation and Coherence in G8 Health Governance: Seizing the 2010 Opportunity

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Good morning. I'm John Kirton, co-director of the Global Health Diplomacy Program and director of the G8 Research Group here at the Munk Centre at Trinity College in the University of Toronto. On behalf of my co-director James Orbinski, who has been delayed by an important family obligation, it is my great pleasure to welcome you here for today's important event.

We have come together because on January 1st this year, Canada assumed the chair of the Group of Eight major market democracies, which will hold its annual summit in Huntsville on June 25-26, 2010. In outlining his agenda and objectives for the summit last July, host prime minister Stephen Harper stated:

The G8 has long played a leadership role in international development. It includes some of the world's largest donors, which account for approximately two thirds of official development assistance. The G8 has also provided about 80 per cent of all funds for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and 50 per cent of all funds to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (including 98 percent of all national contributions). In the short term and in the context of the global economic crisis, the G8 can help free up resources for development to restore the economic growth that is essential for sustained poverty reduction. The G8 can also continue to maintain international attention on the social dimensions of development — health, education and the critical areas of maternal and childhood wellbeing.

Last week, Canada's G8 team reaffirmed that the Muskoka Summit would include development with a focus on health, peace and security, and some aspects of climate change issue, probably financing for adaptation and mitigation, as well as economic issues to a limited extent.

The most recent news reports that Prime Minister Harper plans to make "aid for mothers and children in poor countries" and "child and maternal health" a central theme. Reportedly "Ottawa wants to foster collaboration among the richest countries to improve hospitals and health care for mothers and newborns in poor countries. The federal government also wants to set an example by increasing its own spending on maternal and child health in developing countries — although money has not yet been allocated for this effort."

We are gathered here today, as an independent assembly of invited leading experts from many communities and countries, to help make the 2010 G8 summit work for global health. To do so, four tasks lie ahead.

The first is **innovation** — to identify the best, innovative initiatives the G8 can take to save and enhance human lives in large numbers all around the world. This task begins with a focus on child and maternal health. It extends to the many health areas and actions related to this subject and worthy of action in their own right. It mobilizes the best evidence we have in biomedical, social and other sciences to identify smart solutions. And it takes appropriate note of the reality

that G8 and other governments may not have all the resources available to accomplish everything we want by acting in traditional ways.

The second task is **coherence** — to help ensure that our innovative initiatives in health support, and are supported by, those in the summit's other major areas of economics, food, climate change and security. We know how the dynamics in these integrally linked realms can harm human health. But we also need to identify how innovative initiatives in health can actively help accomplish economic, food, climate and security goals, and what policies will best produce benefits for both health and the other realms.

The third task is **acceptability** — to craft our knowledge-based initiatives in the ways most likely to be taken up by the Canadian host, by its G8 partners and participants, and by the international institutions, civil society and others who can help make them work. We know each G8 partner and participant has its own priorities. But we also know, after 30 years of G8 health governance, that all the G8 partners can and often do pull together in a common cause.

The fourth task is **accountability** — to help ensure that G8 commitments are crafted in a way that leads to effective action in the real world. We are not ultimately interested in fine words that feel good when they appear in a summit communiqué. We want those commitments to be complied with, to be implemented and to effectively save and enhance lives around the world. We want them to start doing so soon after the summit ends. We know that some initiatives will take longer to produce real results. But we also know that the Millennium Development Goals, including the three of its eight goals that focus on health, are due to be delivered a short five years from now. If we are to reach them, we have no time to lose.

In taking up these tasks, we owe an immense debt to our many partners and sponsors, from several communities, who all responded to our invitation to come together, and whose guidance and investment, together with your expertise as participants, is essential to our work. Please take a moment to look at the list of our sponsors in your conference kits. We also owe a special word of thanks to those who have come from afar – from India, Japan, Korea and Botswana, and from Switzerland, Britain and the United States.

To use the many talents in this room as effectively as possible, there are several points of procedure we should respect.

1. Our speakers will mostly make only short statements, highlighting their main arguments and allowing maximum time for exchange among the many experts in the room.
2. Detailed presentations from our speakers and other supporting evidence can be found on our website at www.g8.utoronto.ca at the top of the right hand column under “Background papers on Accountability, Innovation and Coherence in G8 Health Governance: Seizing Canada's G8 Opportunity.” Those of you with wireless connections should be able to access them from this room. We will continue to post materials on this page, so if you have a publication or resource to add, please get in touch with Madeline Koch, our managing director and lead conference organizer, at mad.koch@utoronto.ca.
3. Chairs will assume you will read by yourself the biographies of our distinguished speakers that are printed in your conference kits. The chairs will thus move straight to presentations, and allow for as many interventions as possible from the floor.

4. Interveners will keep their comments short and to the point, allowing others to take them up, integrate, comment or build on them.

5. You can speak in either of Canada's two official languages. We have bilingual assistants — Ariel Garneau and Sophie Langlois, among others — on hand to help you should the need arise.

6. It is important that we stick strictly to our schedule, given our large agenda and the other commitments that some have. So use your lunch and breaks as efficiently as you can. And remember that after lunch, we move our conference to Seeley Hall at Trinity College right next door.

7. We would like to circulate later a list of all those who have participated in our conference today. The list will be distributed among you and no one else. If you would like your name and contact information to appear on that list, please tell Madeline, or one of our helpers.

8. Finally, our conversations today are taking place under the Chatham House rule, or on “deep background” as those in Washington DC would say. In short, you can use the information to inform your own thinking but you must not identify the source. We do this so we can have the freest, frankest exchange of information and ideas possible, for the benefit of all.

It is now my great pleasure to turn the chair over to John Dirks, president of the Gairdner Foundation.