

24. Kananaskis's Contribution to Civil Society

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Hello. I'm Professor John Kirton, Director of the G8 Research Group at the University of Toronto, and your lead instructor for G8 Online 2002.

In this lecture, "Kananaskis's Contribution to Civil Society," we look in turn at how and how well G8 leaders at the Kananaskis Summit mobilized their **civil society** constituents, to help realize their own objectives and to act more ambitiously and effectively than they would have on their own.

In the early analyses offered in the days following the Summit, there was much disagreement about how the G8 and civil society had come together for the Summit, and to what effect. One school of thought lamented the small number and peaceful practices of the protesters who took to the streets in Calgary and Ottawa, and blamed the isolated location of the Summit and police intimidation for this sad result. A second school argued approvingly that Kananaskis was a peaceful summit because the civil society movement had convinced its more radical elements to renounce violence, built a broader coalition in which recent immigrants and people of colour now felt at home, and thus succeeded in getting its political message out. A third school also applauded the peaceful nature and pressure group orientation of civil society at the Summit, but expressed regret that the G8 had not engaged them more productively in the global development purposes they largely shared. And there was, no doubt, a fourth school that took silent satisfaction in how civil society had been subdued at the Summit, and in the hope that future G8 meetings might not have to deal seriously with it again.

In this lecture I argue that Kananaskis was a predictably peaceful Summit, but one where G8 governments' fears of violence led them to

engage civil society less meaningfully than they could have — and should have — to realize their common goals. The advantages of holding the G8 Summit in Canada, in Calgary and in Kananaskis, in a geography and political culture offering "peace, order and good government," understandably produced a summit as peaceful as Genoa had been violent the year before (Kirton 2002). Yet the peaceful payoff of Kananaskis was also due to the exceptional educational efforts by the Canadian host in the months leading up to the Summit, and to the Canadian and G8 commitment to focusing the agenda on a central purpose — poverty reduction in Africa — that G8 governments leaders and their civil society constituents largely shared. With so much going for them, however, G8 governments and civil society should have been able to realize their common interests at an earlier stage, and forge a deeper partnership at the Summit to ensure that their shared vocation is accomplished in the years to come (Smith 2002).

A. Peace, Order and Good Government:

Civil Society–G8 Performance at Kananaskis

From the moment that Canadian prime minister Jean Chrétien announced, at the end of the Genoa Summit, that he would hold the 2002 Summit in Kananaskis, Alberta, it was clear that it would be a much more peaceful G8 gathering than violence- and death-plagued Genoa had been (Kirton 2002). An isolated inland location, in a country and province where the values and practice of peace, order and good government ran high, and those of civil disobedience and terrorism ran low, promised a summit at which civil society could relate to G8 governments in the same peaceful and politically potent way it had at Okinawa in 2000, Cologne in 1999 and Birmingham in 1998.

As it unfolded, Kananaskis more than lived up to the first promise of being a peaceful Summit. Unlike Genoa, no one was injured by bombs or died. The sole exception was a bear that, after venturing too close to the leaders at Kananaskis, retreated up a tree out of which it fell. At Kananaskis, at nearby Calgary and in distant Ottawa, Canada's capital city, there were virtually no injuries, property damage or arrests, among the estimated 3,000 protestors who assembled in Calgary and Kananaskis and the further 4,000 in Ottawa. By the end of the Summit, only three people in Calgary and Kananaskis — two visiting Americans and one union official — had been arrested. In Ottawa, perhaps symbolically, an American flag failed to catch fire as it was drenched by heavy rains (Nickerson 2002).

In its peaceful form, Kananaskis almost matched the entirely peaceful pre-Summit G8 foreign ministers meeting in Whistler, British Columbia, where no one was arrested. It surpassed the G7 finance ministers meetings held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where more than 30 protestors were taken into custody. It also left the 2,000–3,500 media in Calgary, of whom only about 100 were allowed to go near the leaders at Kananaskis, little other than the substance of the Summit to report. While some wondered whether the estimated cost of CA\$300–500 million was a worthwhile investment, Calgarians largely welcomed the estimated CA\$243 million that was injected into the local economy by the media and those they covered.

B. Causes of the Kananaskis Civility

Why was civil society at Kananaskis Summit so civil? Why was it such a sharp contrast to the G8 in Genoa a year earlier and to the rising tide of protest and violence at virtually all major international economic gatherings since the **World Trade Organization's** meeting at Seattle in late 1999 (Fратиanni, Savona and Kirton 2002)? Several factors stand out.

First, the non-violent nature of the protest was due to the small numbers who saw fit to

come out. Indeed, the 7,000 civil society activists whom Canada could come up with in total was only one tenth of the 70,000 members of Jubilee 2000 who formed a human chain around the Summit site in Birmingham in 1998 to shout "Drop the debt!" and launch the modern phase of civil society involvement at the Summit itself (Hajnal 2002). With as many security personnel as protestors at Kananaskis and Calgary, it was easy for the authorities to cope, especially as the latter had the country's best and fully professional police forces carefully deployed and well trained in advance.

A second civility-inducing factor was the deliberately non-threatening tactics adopted by the security forces at Kananaskis and Calgary. This was dramatically different from Genoa, where as many as 200,000 civil society protestors clashed with a much larger security force, including some poorly trained reservists hastily mobilized for the event when the unprecedented size of the protestors' ranks became clear. Apparently assuming their new political masters would be supportive, the Italian security forces engaged in pre-emptive offensive tactics as part of their repertoire.

A third, and more powerful, factor was the major educational effort mounted by the Canadian government in the months leading up to the Summit. This included the most extensive schedule of meetings between the **sherpa** and civil society in Summit history, extensive hearings and a civil society-friendly report by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (Canada 2002), funding for the G6B "People's Summit" that took place at the University of Calgary in the five days before the Summit opened, and Internet-based efforts aimed at primary, secondary and post-secondary students around the world. This educational approach set the tone for the civil society encounters at the time of the Summit, gave a chance for many to be heard in the months before, and allowed people to learn

what particular purpose this Summit was trying to achieve.

The fourth and final factor was the “common purposes” between G8 governors on the inside and their civil society constituents on the outside, as an extended version of the **concert equality** model would predict. Both communities were committed to reducing poverty in Africa as the central goal of the Summit, raising new monies to do it, and bringing African leaders into the Summit in a new partnership in which Africans themselves took the lead. Civil society voices thus largely moved away from the old central rallying cry of combating the neo-liberal corporate globalization that the G8 presumably was trying to impose on a reluctant world. Instead, in an authentic display of domestic interest-group politics elevated to the level of global governance, civil society groups demanded that their governments go further, faster, in democratizing and developing Africa, and that the G8 leaders devote more attention and money to the particular cause, from health to education to energy, that they felt was the key.

C. The Consequences of the Canadian Civility Model

What impact did this Canadian civility have in leading G8 governors to change their deliberations, directions and decisions in ways the civil society coalition could approve? Very little, if the judgements of civil society representatives unleashed at the conclusion of the Summit can be believed. Despite the commonality in purpose, there were few thanks from civil society organizations for the G8's role in coming through for Africa. The Catholic aid organization Cafod declared that G8 leaders had “squandered” their Summit chance and thus “failed” Africa. CARE complained that “it's not new money” that was offered. Christian Aid said the new US\$1 billion in debt relief

for Africa was merely “treading water.” Britain's Action Aid called it “crumbs from the world's table.” A U.S. coalition called 50 Years Is Not Enough concluded that it was “not sure” that the G8's Africa Action Plan was “better than nothing.” Oxfam agreed that it was “all talk and no action.” With such a reaction, G8 leaders might well wonder why they should even try to do anything for Africa next year.

Yet French president Jacques Chirac promised that, as host, he would focus next year's Summit on the single centrepiece theme of African development as well. This was perhaps in part a result of his admiration for the peaceful Summit the Canadians had produced. He might also have done so in the knowledge, confirmed by the public opinion polls, that otherwise uninterested G8 citizens will follow where their democratic governors lead, but only if the cause is true to the core democratic mission of the G8 community.

As Canada's sympathetic foreign minister, Bill Graham, told the G6B in its final session, “we live in democratic societies, and ultimately we respond to public opinion.” Yet in contrast to the Summits from 1998 to 2000, at Kananaskis there was little direct evidence of successful civil society “push” as opposed to G8 government “pull.” This was in large part because there was less genuine consultation and partnership, as opposed to education, on the road to and at Kananaskis, than Canada had offered when it hosted the Quebec City Summit of the Americas in April 2001. And the lost opportunity was significant, given the critical role that civil society must play, as the G8's own Africa Action Plan properly emphasized, in making the **New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)** work. There is thus much work to be done in moving the G8–civil society relationship from civil dialogue to the genuine, engaged partnership necessary to realize their shared ideals.

References

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Discussion Questions

1. Why was the civil society presence at Kananaskis so peaceful?
2. Did the civil character of the civil society involvement in the 2002 Summit enhance or inhibit the ability of civil society groups to get their message out and to influence the G8 policy process as a result?
3. Could and should the Canadian government have mounted at Calgary and Kananaskis the type of civil society forum, as part of the Summit itself, that the Canadian government did when it hosted the western hemisphere democratic leaders in the Quebec City Summit of the Americas in April 2001?
4. Compare and contrast the G8's views on civil society in their concluding Kananaskis "Chair's Statement" with their views in the G8's Africa Action Plan aimed at the Africans and in earlier G8 communiqués. What conclusions does this analysis suggest?
5. Is the 2002 Summit, to be held somewhere in France starting on June 1, likely to be as peaceful as Kananaskis was?

Quiz

1. The number of people arrested in Calgary and Kananaskis in the weeks leading up to and at the 2002 Summit was:
 - a. none
 - b. 3
 - c. 29
 - d. 4,000
2. The total estimated number of civil society protestors at both Calgary and Ottawa was:
 - a. 2,000–3,000
 - b. 7,000
 - c. 17,000
 - d. 200,000
3. The total estimated number of security forces at Calgary and Kananaskis was:
 - a. 3,000
 - b. 7,000
 - c. 27,000
 - d. 30,000
4. The total estimated number of media representatives covering the Summit at both Calgary and Kananaskis was:
 - a. 100
 - b. 2,500
 - c. 9,200
 - d. 15,000
5. Canada's foreign minister is:
 - a. Jean Chrétien
 - b. Susan Whelan
 - c. Bill Graham
 - d. John Manley
6. Next year's G8 Summit in France will start on:
 - a. May 31
 - b. June 1
 - c. July 4
 - d. July 14