

## Evian Talks Could Yield Rich Fruit for Nepad

**Business Day (Johannesburg)**

OPINION

**May 28, 2003**

John Stremlau  
Johannesburg

How deeply divided are the western democracies? What might this mean for Africa? These are issues President Thabo Mbeki faces as he prepares for Sunday's meeting with Group of Eight (G-8) leaders in Evian, France.

Despite last week's 14-0 approval by the United Nations Security Council to end sanctions against Iraq, phase out the oil for-food programme and grant a UN special representative a greater oversight role in Iraq, French President Jacques Chirac opposes the interventionist policy of US President George Bush and seems intent on using the G-8 summit to rally global support for the UN, interests SA shares.

In a surprise step Chirac will host a Sunday G-8 luncheon discussion of northsouth, with the leaders from Brazil, China, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and neighbouring Switzerland, plus African leaders invited earlier.

This will be followed by a G-8 dinner devoted to the New Partnership for Africa's Development, with the presidents of Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and SA. The UN secretary-general and heads of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund will also take part in Sunday's proceedings.

US detractors are already calling the enlarged dialogue with leaders beyond Africa "Chirac's circus" a pompous personal challenge to US leadership of slight symbolic significance.

Such ill will need not preclude Sunday's Nepad dinner focusing on priorities of real value to Africa. However, it will require deft diplomacy by Mbeki and others. Recent security council preoccupation with Iraq has starved Congolese and West African peace efforts of badly needed support. If rebuilding of Iraq diverts development funds, this risks more conflicts in and with Africa.

Other less obvious issues plague G-8 and African relations. For example, Morocco, chairing the developing nations' G-77 and an ally of Paris and Washington, will be at the enlarged luncheon dialogue but not at the Nepad dinner. A dispute on the right of self-determination of about 360000 Saharawi nomads leaves Morocco as the only African state not in the African Union.

Issues such as Moroccan occupation of Spanish Sahara or repression in Zimbabwe are not part of Nepad, which aspires to inclusiveness as a voluntary agreement to uphold human rights, democratic values and an open economy. By backing Nepad, the G-8 confirms its core values as well.

Growing support for Nepad among civil society groups in African and G-8 nations helps. To illustrate, Wits University with the University of Victoria (Canada) as a partner, is co-operating with the UN Economic Commission for Africa and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Centre to produce five designs for Nepad development initiatives by African experts around the continent.

They consist of: an African universities HIV/AIDS consortium; an African code of electoral norms and standards; a low-cost energy scheme for rural populations; a central database of illegal natural resource exploitation, and an innovative micro-enterprise finance fund for West Africa.

Effective implementation will require more generous and flexible G-8 funding, with backing from a strengthened Nepad secretariat. Making credible commitments in this regard will be vital for building better G-8 partnerships with Africa and score significant successes for the Evian summit.

John Stremlau heads international relations at the University of the Witwatersrand.