
FAQs - Group of Eight

1. What is the G8 and who are its members?

The G8 is not a governing body. It is a discussion forum where governments of the leading industrialized countries come together to discuss global issues.

The G8 is made up of eight powerful industrialized countries - Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The European Union is also represented as an observer, but cannot chair or host a summit.

The presidency of the G8 rotates annually on January 1 to each member country in turn.

2. When was it started?

The G8 process emerged from what was to be a one-time meeting of leading heads of state in 1975 to respond to the oil crisis and global economic recession in the early 1970s. The first meeting was held in Rambouillet, France and included only 6 countries (France, the United States, Britain, Germany, Japan and Italy). Canada joined the following year, in 1976, and the group was then known as the Group of Seven or G7.

Russia began participating at parts of the G7 meetings in 1994, but only participated in all aspects of the meetings for the first time in 1998. In 2006 Russia hosted its first G8 summit, completing the process of becoming a full member. (That said, Finance Ministers, who meet several times a year, still meet at the G7 level.)

3. When did Canada join the G8?

Canada joined the G8 at the San Juan Summit of 1976 in Puerto Rico.

4. What is its purpose?

The G8 is intended to provide a forum for member countries to discuss global issues of interest. The primary focus of G8 meetings has been economic issues (in particular the global economy, macroeconomic management, trade, and development), but other issues have also come onto the agenda in recent years. (See Question 7 below.)

5. Who sets the agenda for the meetings?

The agenda of each G8 summit is set by the host nation.

6. What issues does it deal with?

The G8 Summit always addresses global financial and economic issues and any current conflict/security concerns. Other issues that are commonly addressed or have been addressed

at recent summits include African development (since 2003); debt relief for developing countries (1996-2006); poverty, development and aid (especially since 2005); health (especially infectious diseases and AIDS); education (since 2000); nuclear proliferation; trade; climate change (since 2007); and food prices (2008). (See also question 7 below.)

7. When and where does the G8 meet?

Leaders from the G8 countries meet annually, usually in June or July, and the country holding the presidency is responsible for hosting and organizing the final summit. The location therefore rotates annually through each of the G8 countries.

In addition to the annual summit, smaller meetings on specific issues, called ministerials, take place from January to June among representatives from the G8 countries. Much of the agenda-setting and decision-making takes place at these earlier meetings. Regular ministerials take place on crime, development, employment/labour, energy, environment, finance, foreign affairs, terrorism and trade. *Ad hoc* ministerial meetings on other topics are also held if interest warrants.

Annual Summits:

Date	Location	Key Issues
8-10 July, 2009	La Maddalena (Italy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability of G8 • Climate change • Taxation and capital flight
7-9 July 2008	Hokkaido Toyako (Japan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change • Global health • Millennium Development Goals and Africa
6-8 June 2007	Heiligendamm (Germany)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World economy • Africa • Anti-terrorism and security • Review of the G8's health commitments
15-17 July 2006	St Petersburg (Russia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy Security • Education • Health (infectious diseases) • International Security
6-8 July 2005	Gleneagles, Scotland (United Kingdom)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Africa (aid and debt cancellation through the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative) • Climate change
8-10 June 2004	Sea Island, Georgia (United States of America)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle East and North Africa • Terrorism: launch of Secure and Facilitated International Travel Initiative (SAFTI) • Africa • Trade (finalise Doha)
1-3 June 2003	Evian (France)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic growth • Millennium Development Goals • Debt (HIPC) • Security and combating terrorism

Date	Location	Key Issues
26-27 June 2002	Kananaskis (Canada)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development in Africa, the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the Africa Action Plan • Debt relief through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative • Security issues in the Middle East, Afghanistan and India/Pakistan. • Addressing terrorism
20-22 July 2001	Genoa (Italy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debt • Environment
21-23 July 2000	Okinawa (Japan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal primary education • HIV AIDS
18-20 June 1999	Köln (Germany)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustaining global growth • Improving world trade • Employment policy • Global debt crisis
15-17 May 1998	Birmingham (United Kingdom)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World economy (update and commitment to non-inflationary growth) • Strengthening the global financial system • Financial and economic reform in Ukraine

8. What are the outcomes of the meeting?

Each G8 Summit ends with a communiqué (or series of communiqués) that outlines the areas of agreement and any commitments resulting from the Summit. Commitments are made by individual member countries and are non-binding.

9. Is it just G8 countries who meet?

The annual Summit itself is attended by heads of state, ministers of relevant departments (see question 11 below) and other staff from G8 countries. In addition, G8 meetings attract thousands of journalists, and in the last ten years have also attracted a large number of protestors.

Since 2005, at the initiative of Britain's Tony Blair, the leading economies of Brazil, India, China, South Africa and Mexico were also invited to a portion of the G8 meetings. The "Plus Five" have a day of discussion with the regular G8 members, and have an opportunity to try to influence the G8 agenda. In 2008, in Japan, these five economies also came one day in advance of the G8 meeting, and issued their own statement on the same issues being discussed by the G8. France, Italy and Germany are now looking to expand the current G8 formulation to formally include the "Plus five" as well as one country from the Middle East - likely Egypt.

Since 2003, the leaders of 15 African countries have also been invited to the Summit. This is called the Africa Outreach component. These African leaders have a half day meeting with the G8 leaders. In November 2003, the G8 also convened the first meeting of the Africa

Partnership Forum to expand the dialogue around the New Partnership for African Development and discuss strategic, political and socio-economic policy issues and priorities in support of Africa's development. The APFs are held twice a year (spring and fall) with one meeting in Africa and the other in the host country of the G8 Presidency. It brings together African, G8 and OECD representatives and is co-chaired by African Union and NEPAD representatives and G8 and non-G8 OECD countries.

10. When will the G8 meet next in Canada?

Canada will host its next G8 Summit in Huntsville, Ontario June 25-27, 2010.

11. When did the G8 meet previously in Canada and what was the focus of the meeting?

Huntsville in 2010 will be the fifth time Canada has hosted the G8 since it joined in 1976. Previously the G7 met in 2002 in Kananaskis, in 1995 in Halifax, in 1988 in Toronto and in 1981 in Ottawa-Montebello. The Halifax summit focused largely on the reform of international financial institutions, while Kananaskis established the G8 Africa Action Plan heralding a "new partnership" between the G8 and Africa.

The Halifax Summit also marked the founding of the Halifax Initiative by Canadian civil society organizations.

12. What issues will be the focus of the 2010 Summit in Canada?

Canada will host its next G8 Summit in Huntsville, Ontario June 25-27, 2010. Canada has not yet articulated publicly the focus of the 2010 meeting. Broadly speaking, however, it will fall within Canada's foreign policy goals, namely:

- Advancing and promoting Canadian values and interests;
- Advocating for open markets and free trade;
- Championing freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law;
- Taking global action on climate change.

13. What past promises are going to "mature" in 2010?

Some of the past promises that will come to maturity in 2010 include (date and location of summit where commitment was made in parentheses)¹.

- **World economy:** fully implement the OECD standards of transparency and effective exchange of information in tax matters (Japan, 2008).
- **Climate change:** commit to targets (USA, 1997); support carbon capture and storage (CCS) demonstration projects (Japan, 2008); encourage multilateral investment banks to set targets for low carbon investments (Japan, 2008).
- **Biodiversity:** improve efforts to increase protection of biodiversity (Germany, 2007) and reduce rate of loss significantly (Japan, 2008).
- **Nonproliferation:** achieve a successful outcome at the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference (Japan, 2008).

¹ The information above is adapted from Jenilee Guebert. Canada's 2010 G8 Summit Plans. G8 Research Group, University of Toronto. November 2, 2008. Available online at <http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/evaluations/2010huntsville/2010plans/2010-g8plans-081102.pdf> (accessed December 13, 2008).

- **Africa - development:** fulfill commitments to double aid to Africa by 2010 (United Kingdom, 2005); successfully replenish International Development Association (IDA) funds (Japan, 2008).
- **Africa - peace:** provide technical and financial support so that African countries and regional and sub-regional organizations can more effectively prevent and intervene in violent conflict (Canada, 2002); equip approximately 75,000 troops for peace operations worldwide, with a focus on Africa, by 2010 (USA, 2004 - similar pledges were reiterated at Summits in the United Kingdom, 2005 and Japan, 2008).
- **Africa - health:** commitment to support 'Roll Back Malaria' (Germany, 1998), Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis (TB), and Malaria, the Global Plan to Stop TB, the Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment (Russia, 2006) (similar pledges were reiterated at Summits in the United Kingdom, 2005, Germany, 2007 and Japan, 2008); commitment to work in partnership with governments, the World Health Organization, industry and other international organizations to reduce the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in young people, the number of deaths due to TB, and the burden of disease from malaria (Japan, 2000 - similar pledges were reiterated at Summits in the United Kingdom, 2005, Germany, 2007 and Japan, 2008); working to develop and strengthen health systems, especially primary health care (Germany, 2007); providing universal coverage of Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS programs (Germany, 2007); work towards meeting the needs for more pediatric treatments for HIV/AIDS (Germany, 2007); expand access to long-lasting insecticide treated bed nets to prevent malaria (Japan, 2008).

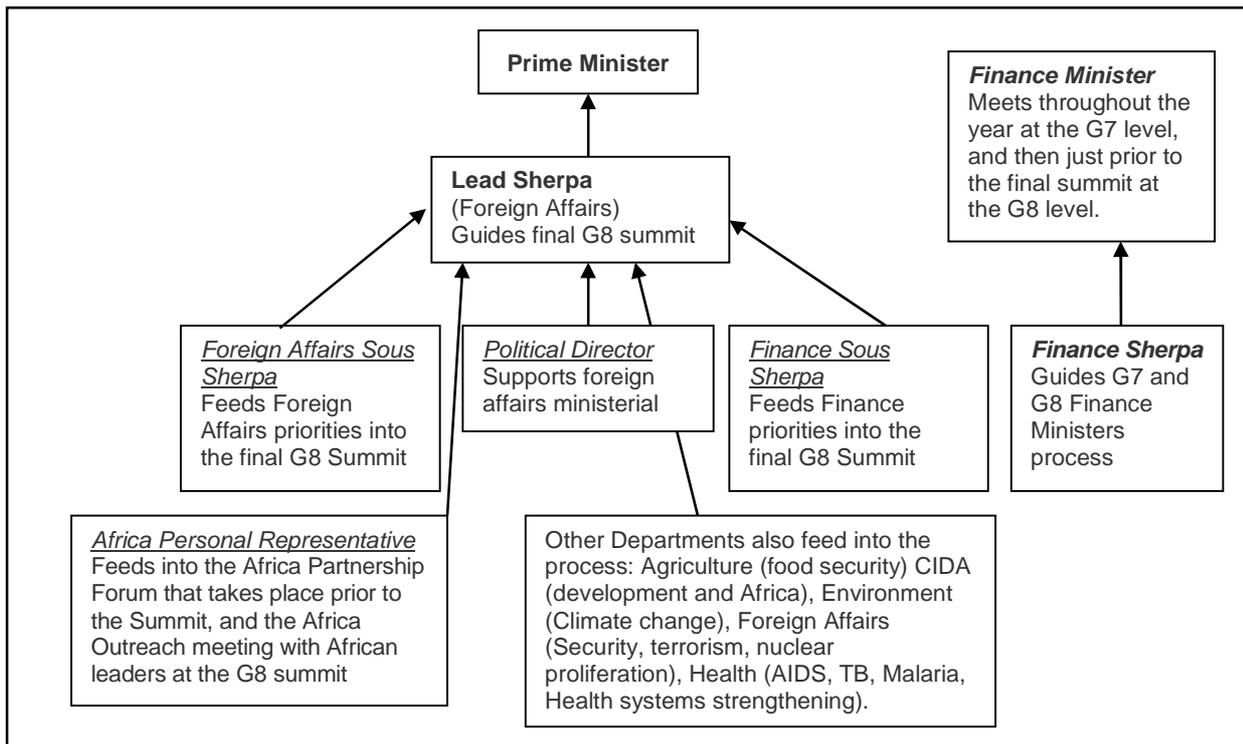
14. What Canadian government departments are involved in the G8?

Canadian government departments involved in the G8 on a regular basis include the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and Privy Council Office (PCO), Foreign Affairs, Finance, and CIDA. Other departments are involved on an *ad hoc* basis when specific issues emerge (e.g. Health Canada and Environment Canada). In recent years Foreign Affairs has been the lead ministry responsible for coordinating Canada's participation in G8 Summits.

In the lead up to each summit meeting, the host country organizes preparatory meetings. G8 leaders' personal representatives, called Sherpas after the Nepalese guides who help mountain climbers reach summits, attend these meetings to discuss potential agenda items. Their work helps leaders focus on key subjects. The host Sherpa, drawn from the high ranks of the civil service, works with other G8 Sherpas throughout the year in the lead-up to the Summit, and oversees implementing the commitments made by the host government. The Sherpas are supported by other senior officials who focus on major economic, financial and political issues.

In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Sherpa for the Hokkaido Toyako Summit was Leonard J. Edwards, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Please see the org chart below for further details.



15. What are some critiques of the G8?

The most common criticism of the G8 is around representation. The G8 represents the interests of only a small and elite group of industrialized nations. It no longer even reflects the most powerful economies in terms of nominal GDP (the original conception), as both China and Spain have moved ahead of Canada and Russia, and Brazil is also ahead of Russia. Countries with fast-growing populations and economies such as China, India and Brazil are excluded, and there are no African or Latin American members.

Another criticism is that the G8 meetings are secretive and undemocratic. Critics argue that the institutions largely controlled by the G8 - the World Bank and the IMF - implement the policy decisions agreed to at G8 Summits, decisions that effectively steer the global economy.

Finally, although each G8 meeting concludes with an announcement of the initiatives agreed to by member countries, follow up on commitments is poor. There are no real accountability measures built in, and it is up to each country to individually implement any commitments made. Perhaps in response to this long standing criticism, the focus of the Italian G8 in 2009 is on accountability.

16. So wouldn't a G-13, G14 or G-20 be better?

As noted above, various countries and heads of international financial institutions are currently pushing for a revised G-8, arguing that it no longer reflects the reality of the global economy (with various new emerging economies becoming significant global players) and that the current G-8 meetings are more pomp and ceremony than an agenda for action.

To that extent, many marked mid-November's meeting on the global financial crisis of members

of the Group of 20 in Washington as a significant shift. Perhaps it is, however, the G-20 still restricts its discussions to financial issues, and within the membership of the G-20 there is only one African country represented and no low-income countries. At the time of the meeting, in fact, over 900 organizations from 115 countries called for an international conference, under the rubric of the United Nations, to address the financial crisis - a “G-192” so to speak.

With input from Mark Fried, Oxfam Canada and Dennis Howlett, Make Poverty History Canada.



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