

## G8 for Dummies

### What is the G8?

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The G8 stands for the 'Group of Eight' which is comprised of the world's leading industrialized nations: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. It was initiated in 1975 by the French President, who convened a meeting with leaders from the U.S., UK, Germany, Japan and Italy to collectively discuss the global issues of the time. Since then, the group has grown to eight members and has become an informal but established group that meets every year to tackle global challenges through discussion and action. It is not a legal body and has no formal rules or procedures. Since the United Kingdom holds the presidency of the G8 this year, the summit is scheduled to be held in Perthshire, Scotland, from July 6-8.

### Why is the G8 important?

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In today's interconnected world, threats are not confined to national borders and require national, regional and global approaches to solve problems. The G8 Summits provide a forum for the leaders of the world's most powerful countries to meet and discuss how to work together on issues such as terrorism, non-proliferation, poverty, disease, trade, and climate change. This year, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has made achieving the Millennium Development Goals a priority of the Summit.

### What is on the G8 agenda for this year?

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In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has designated three main agenda items for this year's G8 Summit: debt relief, increasing aid to Africa, and climate change.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed to in September, 2000, are ambitious but attainable targets for the year 2015 in the global effort to address poverty, hunger, disease, and other development challenges. In the report he published in March, Secretary General Kofi Annan emphasized that "humanity will not enjoy development without security, or security without development." The Secretary General has long held that countries must commit 0.7% of their gross national incomes in order to achieve the MDGs. Donor countries reaffirmed their commitment to increase their Official Development Assistance (ODA) at the 2002 Financing for Development conference in Monterrey.

#### **Increasing aid to Africa:**

Of the 20 poorest countries in the world, 18 are in Africa. Prime Minister Blair therefore has urged G8 members to double their aid to Africa. The world is too small for us to ignore the impact of our actions on others, that how people in other countries live affects the U.S. Threats such as terrorism, new diseases, and illegal drugs flourish in countries where lawlessness and poverty prevails. Helping responsible governments get stronger, offering their people hope for a better future, is a smart investment in our security.

***U.S. position: The Bush Administration has incrementally increased aid to Africa but has refused to match the level of our G8 partners or a level sufficient to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.***

# FACT SHEET

## Investing in Debt relief:

Another item at the forefront of the agenda is investing in debt relief. Many poor countries spend more in interest on old loans from foreign governments and banks than on health and education for their own people.

Canceling loans for countries that are committed to good policies and responsible governance can make a huge difference. For example, \$3 billion in debt relief is helping Tanzania send 1.6 million children to school. Its neighbor, Uganda, used the money it saved through debt relief to make primary education free for every child, which it couldn't afford before.

On June 11, G8 finance ministers agreed to write off \$40 billion in debt owed by 18 of the world's poorest countries, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa. With more resources at their disposal, millions of Africans will be provided the right mix of tools and resources to invest in education, health care, jobs, businesses and economic stability.

***U.S. position: The Bush Administration supports this initiative.***

## Climate change:

Scientists agree that human pollution of so-called greenhouse gases, most notably carbon dioxide, is causing significant shifts in global climate patterns. These shifts are increasing the frequency and danger of extreme weather events, reducing agricultural output in certain areas, and causing sea levels to rise. Prime Minister Blair is one of many world leaders who recognize the grave threat that climate change poses to humanity.

In spite of U.S. opposition to the Kyoto Protocol, which all other G8 countries have ratified as a first response to the problem, Prime Minister Blair is attempting to forge a new consensus for a long-term agenda on climate change. He is offering a wide range of options for the discussion.

***U.S. Position: The Bush Administration questions the importance of human activity in climate change and refuses to regulate carbon dioxide emissions. The Administration also invests very few resources in climate change research or technological solutions.***

## Key Recommendations

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- The United States should increase Official Development Assistance (ODA) substantially in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.
- The Bush Administration should actively engage with the international community to develop a long-term, comprehensive strategy on climate change.
- The G8 agenda should address critical security and human rights issues that affect the course of sustainable development in Africa. These include Charles Taylor's criminal activities in West Africa, human rights violations and democratic failures in Zimbabwe, the ongoing conflict in Democratic Republic of Congo, and the crisis in Darfur.
- The U.S. should maintain a firewall between aid pledges and our commitment to debt relief.

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