

Commission for Africa

Organization: Commission for Africa

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Description A personal initiative of the British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the Commission for Africa was struck in February 2004 to comprehensively evaluate the continent's experiences with development and articulate policy solutions. Comprised of seventeen eminent persons including active politicians and international civil servants, and supported by a Secretariat and British Government funding, the Commission engaged in wide-ranging consultations with Africans and the development community in 2004. Commissioners from African and Group of 8 (G-8) countries were focused on one of six issue areas, including the economy, governance, natural resources, human development, culture and participation, and peace and security. After three formal meetings, the Commission made public its report, *Our Common Interest*, on 11 March 2005. This release coincided with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Brandt Commission's report.

The Commission for Africa noted that high-income countries have a moral duty and a long-term self-interest in improving the quantity and quality of aid flows. It advocated an immediate \$25 billion USD increase in donor country aid flows through 2010, with an additional \$25 billion per year being made available through 2015 after a review.

Commissioners noted that these funds would be used to improve human development, governance capacity, and conflict prevention, and enable a doubling of spending on transportation, energy, and communications infrastructure. To improve aid's effectiveness, the Commission called for more grants, rather than loans, and aid flows that were less "tied" to purchases of goods produced in donor nations. It also proposed the full cancellation of Sub-Saharan Africa's external debt burden, and the elimination of barriers to Africa's exports. African leaders were called upon to improve their capacity to be accountable to their populations and donors through increasing democratic participation and making governance more transparent.

Overall, *Our Common Interest* updated Brandt's finding that there was a mutual North-South interest in addressing development problems. The report's implicit message was that more involvement in Africa, and with Africa, would lead to better economic performance for all countries. Autonomous policy directions in the face of economic globalization were considered to be non-starters. African governments were implored to mimic the institutions of western liberal democracies to ensure that they could reap the welfare gains assumed to flow from integration with the global economy.

Prime Minister Blair hoped to advance the Commission's positions through his presidency of the Group of 8 in 2005. The Commission's push for aid paralleled the drive to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Suggested Reading: **Commission for Africa Website.** www.commissionforafrica.org/index.html (accessed 15 July 2005).

Commission for Africa. 2005. *Our common interest: An argument*. London: Penguin Books.

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