



## **Background to the G8**

In 1975, the French President Giscard d'Estaing invited the Leaders of Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States and Italy to an informal gathering at the chateau of Rambouillet, near Paris. The idea was for the 6 to discuss current world issues (dominated at the time by the oil crisis) in a frank and informal manner. There was to be no army of advisers, just the Leaders in a relaxed and private setting. Following the success of the Rambouillet summit, these meetings became an annual event, with the inclusion of Canada as the 7th member of the group at the 1976 summit in Puerto Rico.

The work of the group has evolved over the years in reaction to changing needs and political context. What started as a forum focusing on essentially fine tuning of short term economic policies among participant countries has now turned to a more structural and global perspective and has added a wide range of political and social issues to its workload, especially in the area of sustainable development and global health. The group's informal nature has allowed it to evolve while remaining effective and relevant.

## **Developments during summits since 1995**

Each summit is unique and takes the G7 one step further in its evolution. The 1995 summit in Halifax, Canada, led to significant changes in the way in which the World Bank, the IMF and other international organisations operated.



Halifax Summit (Canada), June 15, 1995. Group photo.  
French National Archives Photo Library

The 1996 summit in Lyons launched the first Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative.

The 1997 summit in Denver saw the clearest ever indication that the Cold War had ended with the historic invitation for Russia to join the group.

The 1998 summit in Birmingham saw the first G8 summit and the adoption of the

"heads only" policy that separated the summit of the Heads of State and Government from that of their Foreign and Finance ministers.

The Cologne Summit in 1999 saw the Enhanced HIPC Initiative that agreed over \$37 billion of debt relief to some of the world's most needy countries.



Cologne Summit (Germany), June 19, 1999. Group photo (Heinrich Böll Square).  
French National Archives Photo Library

In 2000 at the Okinawa summit, Heads agreed to provide further funding to fight infectious disease and adopted a charter on new information and communications technology and the digital divide.

The 2001 summit at Genova saw the creation of a Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Leaders were also joined at the summit by Heads of State of some of the most important African nations to launch the New Africa Initiative, now called NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development). To demonstrate their support for this important document, the Leaders each appointed a Personal Representative for Africa.



Genova Summit (Italy), July 20, 2001. Group photo: G8 leaders with NEPAD representatives.  
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These representatives worked with the African Leaders and produced a G8 Action Plan at the Kananaskis Summit in 2002 that provided a solid commitment from each

member of the G8 to Africa and agreed priority areas for development assistance. At Kananaskis, Leaders also announced important work on the fight against terrorism, (and notably the creation of the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction and the adoption of transport security measures), sustainable development and education for all. Leaders also examined a number of regional issues (the situation in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and India/Pakistan relations).



Kananaskis Summit (Canada), June 25–27, 2002. Group photo taken at the conclusion of the meeting on the New Partnership for Africa's Development.  
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### **From the G7 to the G8**

The group remained at 7 until Russia, who had attended the meetings as an observer throughout the 1990s, was invited to formalise this relationship in 1997. The first G8 summit subsequently took place in 1998. At Kananaskis, Heads of State and Government made an historic decision and invited Russia to assume the G8 presidency and host the summit for the first time in 2006, reflecting the remarkable economic and democratic change that had occurred over the previous years. The European Union also has an observer status at G8 meetings and is represented by the President of the Commission as well as the Leader of the country that holds the presidency of the European Union.

### **Meetings that remain informal**

Despite an increasing workload, the G8 has managed to retain its informal character and remain largely free of bureaucracy. It has no secretariat and no formal rules of procedure. The member of the group whose turn it is to act as chair sets the agenda and decides the most appropriate method to treat each subject. The chair hosts and organises the summit, acts as the spokesman for the group during the year, co-ordinates the work of the G8 working groups and is responsible for engaging Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), international financial institutions and other sectors of civil society in the group's work.

### **French Chair of the Evian Summit (1–3 June 2003)**

The summit of G8 Heads traditionally takes place over a weekend in early Summer each year. This year it will be held from 1 to 3 June in Evian–les–Bains in the French Alps. A meeting like this of course requires a thorough process of preparation. This is carried out through a series of meetings throughout the year attended by the personal representatives of the Leaders who are known as "Sherpas". This name is taken from the name of the Himalayan porters who help others reach mountain summits. The French Sherpa is M. Gourdault–Montagne, President Chirac' Diplomatic Adviser. He and the Sherpas from the other G8 countries work through possible agenda issues during the year allowing the Leaders to focus on the critical points when they meet for the summit. The Sherpas are also responsible for overseeing the implementation of the decisions taken at the summit.

Each Sherpa is supported by two assistants (Sous–Sherpa) from their own country: a finance Sous–Sherpa and a foreign affairs Sous–Sherpa who deal with new issues and analyse progress on previous G8 commitments. The Political Director of the foreign ministry will also prepare timely political and security issues for the summit. Other G8 technical meetings may be held on related subjects throughout the year.

