

McLaughlin-Rotman Centre FOR GLOBAL HEALTH

Good afternoon everyone! Let me just say what a pleasure it is to join my colleagues on this panel. Along with our own CIHR, Tachi and Mark represent two of the three funding partners in the Grand Challenges for Global Health initiative which has proven the value of discovery science in global health: it is developing new technologies, creating new communities of researchers, and capturing the public imagination. And Jeff is doing outstanding work as the Director of Global Health at Emory University, showing how universities matter in global health.

So it's a real honour to share this panel with them and this time with all of you.

I also want to add my own words of congratulations to the Gairdner Foundation on its golden anniversary!

Fifty years is a long time! In 1959, John Diefenbaker was Prime Minister and Dwight D. Eisenhower was in the White House. The St. Lawrence Seaway opened that year, and Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba. Mattel launched a new doll named Barbie and Canadians watched Bonanza on their new black and white television sets.

In medicine, the American Secretary of State for Health advised American housewives to stop buying cranberries because they could lead to thyroid cancer! Two years later, the U.S. Surgeon General would issue his warning that smoking causes lung cancer.

And here in Canada, a visionary businessman by the name of James Gairdner, launched a new award to recognize breakthrough scientific discoveries. Significantly, it was an *international* award, at a time when Canadians were playing major roles on the international stage.

Just two years earlier, Lester Pearson had won a Nobel Peace Prize for his role in resolving the Suez crisis. Pearson's proposal - the creation of peace keeping forces wearing the blue helmets of the United Nations - revolutionized international relations, revitalized the U.N. and cemented Canada's reputation in global affairs. Quite simply, it was a time when Canada's foreign policy mattered. To us. And to the world.

It's time for Canada to make that kind of distinctive contribution again - to building a better, safer world. Just as this country articulated a new way to address global conflict through peacekeeping, today we have the opportunity to address global challenges through science. And, in the process, create a coherent and compelling new brand for our foreign policy.

So what would our brand be? That Canada - and Canadian scientists - help solve global health

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challenges. We do so both directly and by fostering innovation in developing countries. This would be a unique niche for our country, one in which we lead the way and inspire others to follow.

Think of it as expanding beyond blue helmets to white lab coats. Or, as Francis Collins recently described global health, “the chance to be more of a doctor to the world than a soldier to the world.”

I believe the time is right for this kind of bold initiative. *I know* the *need* is great. We live in a world where almost 10 million children die before their fifth birthday. Where more than a billion people go hungry every day.

Make no mistake, in an interconnected world, these problems are our problems - “we are they”- as H1N1 has made clear.

And yet here in Canada, where we spend about \$580 million per year in our international development envelope on global health, only a tiny fraction - less than one or two percent - goes to discovery science.

Can science help address these global challenges? Absolutely! Just look at malaria - a disease that kills one million children in Africa every year and for which there is currently no vaccine. Today? We have three malaria vaccine candidates in the pipeline. Think of what a successful vaccine for malaria would mean to the world!

And HIV AIDS. Just last month we had tantalizing results in the Thai Prime Boost Trial - the first indication that a vaccine for HIV might work.

And through the Grand Challenges in Global Health, staple crops like cassava, sorghum, rice and bananas that are loaded with micronutrients - iron, vitamin A and zinc - all critical to human health but so often missing from the diet of the poor – are approaching field trials.

So science is delivering results and there are tremendous opportunities to make a difference.

Well, you may say, sounds good in theory. But does Canada really have what it takes to develop a distinctive new priority for its foreign policy - one based in science and driven by innovation? Can we match our actions with our ambition? The answer is absolutely!

In fact, much of the infrastructure is already in place. We have the International Development Research Centre, which is not widely known in Canada but respected around the world. Its tag line is “science for humanity” and it was created in 1970 to help developing countries use science and technology to find “practical, long-term solutions to the social, economic and environmental problems they face.”

We have the Global Health Research Initiative, a partnership among the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Public Health Agency of Canada, and Health Canada, and IDRC and the

Canadian International Development Agency, which does twinning between Canadian and developing world scientists.

We have Canadian scientists already making an enormous contribution to global health. Just consider the efforts of Drs. Allan Ronald and Frank Plummer, in Nairobi. Their work on HIV/AIDS, over thirty years, has improved our understanding of how that virus spreads, created research opportunities for African researchers and improved - and in many cases started - sexually transmitted disease treatment and counseling in Nairobi clinics. And Plummer has recently done amazing work on HIV resistance among sex workers under a grant from the Grand Challenges in Global Health initiative.

We also have world class universities that could become involved not only through collaborative research, but also by harnessing the incredible energy and enthusiasm of Canadian youth to address global problems. I am amazed, impressed - and inspired - by the ingenuity, energy, commitment and creativity of today's students in wanting to help solve global problems. This is an extremely connected, globally aware generation. And anybody that says campus idealism died in the 1960s isn't visiting Canadian campuses! They're just looking for an outlet for their idealism - and branding Canadian foreign policy as helping developing countries through science and innovation answers that need.

Another important asset for Canada is our diaspora. There are few countries in the world that cannot look to Canada without seeing their own reflection. In fact, Canada is home to more than 15,000 scientific and health-related professionals from developing countries. Many of these still have family there. Ties. Connections. And these linkages provide a unique opportunity to expand our scientific networks, while at the same time enabling our scientists and engineers to give back to the nations which they have come from.

We have the Canada Gairdner Global Health Award, launched this year. This year's winner is Dr. Nubia Munoz, for her epidemiological studies defining the essential role of the human papilloma virus in the etiology of cervical cancer. This led to the development of successful vaccines. Dr. Munoz is with us today and I'd like to recognize her and her outstanding work.

The Canada Gairdner Global Health awards will not only identify Canada with global health and innovation, but also by *celebrating* success in solving problems through science inspire others to join the cause.

And very significantly, we have the new Development Innovation Fund. In the 2008 federal Budget, the Government announced \$50 million for the creation of the Development Innovation Fund which would, and I quote, "create breakthrough discoveries with the potential to significantly improve the lives of millions in the developing world." end quote.

So there's simply no doubt that Canada has what it takes to help solve global health challenges and foster innovation in developing countries.

So why make these efforts to brand ourselves as a country whose scientists help solve global health challenges by fostering innovation? Why expand beyond blue helmets to white lab coats?

Five quick reasons.

First, Canada will help solve important problems plaguing five billion people in the developing world. And, in the process, address one of the most critical issues of our times - the disparities in health and well-being between the rich and poor countries. Why is it acceptable, for example, that a child born in Canada will live to 80 years of age, while a child born in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa will only live to age 40?

Second, Canada will develop solutions that will benefit us domestically, especially with respect to shared threats such as H1N1, climate change and chronic disease. In particular, some of these solutions will apply to Canada's Aboriginal communities. Indeed, addressing the challenges of our own Aboriginal population will reinforce our credibility as a country that helps developing communities abroad by also addressing needs at home.

Third, by helping countries solve problems with science, we help them to develop, to raise their living standards. Stated another way, the best way to keep countries poor is to make sure that they don't develop their own talent. That they don't turn their own domestic ideas into products and services. Canada can help countries escape that trap.

Traditional models of international development are increasingly being called into question - Dambisa Moyo's book "Dead Aid" is the most recent example. It's time for a new approach, focused on science and innovation.

For example, why not create a centre in sub-Saharan Africa to connect scientists and entrepreneurs, similar to the MaRS Discovery District here in Toronto?

Fourth, developing a brand related to innovation, while it may begin with development, will also reinforce trade relations in innovative sectors, helping to market Canadian companies abroad. Quite simply, making Canada a leader in global health will create opportunities to develop and sell Canadian innovation - and Canadian products - to the world.

Indeed, developing and emerging economies also represent the fastest growing markets for Canadian life sciences technologies, knowledge and products. So there are significant opportunities for Canadian businesses.

Fifth, science fosters diplomacy. A friend of mine, who was an American Colonel involved in negotiations with the Soviets on issues of biosecurity, told me that often, when the diplomats reached an impasse, it was scientists, on both sides, who broke through. That's because they spoke a common language. The language of science. Perhaps the only universal language.

So what should we do? The upcoming meetings of the G8 and G20 in Muskoka next summer provide important opportunities to shape the agenda. Exercise leadership. And set us on a new course.

At a time when the G20 is emerging as the new institution for global governance - when power is shifting from the West to a more global community - Canada needs to redefine its role. Re-establish its relevance. Canada should raise the role of science and innovation, showcase the Development Innovation Fund, and inspire and invite other nations to develop grand challenges initiatives.

Imagine what could happen if every international development agency also funded science and innovation. Imagine different countries partnering on new, specific grand challenges, leveraging the success of the model. Think of what that could mean to global health. To the millions dying from preventable disease. To life expectancy in developing countries. To the creation of a safer and more equitable world.

So for Canada, expanding beyond blue helmets to white lab coats brings significant benefits. To brand our foreign policy based on helping others through science. Canada as an innovation power. Solving big problems. Driving Canadian innovation. Opening new markets. Helping countries to develop. Promoting diplomacy. And carving a niche for ourselves in the emerging G20.

Canada is not a country of small dreams. Modest ambition. Limited vision. The proposal I have made today builds on our strengths, honours our past and points us to a larger - and better - future.

But we have to act. 1959, the year James Gairdner launched these awards, is also remembered for another major event - the cancellation of the Avro Arrow. Whatever the reasons behind that decision, there is no question that it is now remembered as an opportunity lost, as a time when the genius of our people was not matched by our vision.

Let's not make the same mistake, fifty years later. Let's seize this moment, this unique confluence of Canadian expertise and international need, to brand Canada as a leader in global health and innovation!

It's within our reach. And we have the ideal opportunity to take this new Canadian brand to market in June of this year when we host the G8 and co-host the G20.

It's just the kind of visionary goal that James Gairdner would have understood.

Thank you.

- Peter Singer