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Canadian firms in Africa fail fight against AIDS, Lewis says

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FROM TUESDAY'S GLOBE AND MAIL

TORONTO — Global AIDS activist Stephen Lewis chastised Canadian corporations yesterday for not doing enough for Africa, saying there is a racist undercurrent at play.

Mr. Lewis made the comments as he prepares to wrap up his term as the United Nations special envoy for HIV-AIDS in Africa, a position he has held since mid-2001.

He didn't single out any Canadian company for praise or criticism, but emphasized that much more needs to be done to help Africa.

Mr. Lewis said he sides with Senator Roméo Dallaire, who led the UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda in 1994 and appealed in vain for other countries to send troops to stop an impending bloodbath.

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"I tend to agree with Roméo Dallaire. There is an unacknowledged, subterranean racism at work. . . . There's also a tendency just to discard Africa as no longer of geopolitical value in the world or to engage in the vile slander that Africa is too corrupt to support," Mr. Lewis said at a lunch organized by the Canadian Club of Toronto. The audience of 350 people in the hotel ballroom included business executives and high-school students.

The Canadian Club's title for the event was: "Beyond philanthropy: Creative engagement of the Canadian corporate sector."

Mr. Lewis said the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the world's wealthiest charitable trust, has stepped up to support Africa, "but not the corporate world."