

Friendship and Cooperation for a Better Future of China-Africa Relations

Address by H.E. Tian Xuejun
Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of South Africa
At the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA)
Johannesburg, 4 July 2012

It is my great pleasure to receive the invitation and visit SAIIA. SAIIA has been regarded as the best think tank in the sub-Saharan region, a research institute of high esteem not only in South Africa but all over the world. You have, in recent years, actively engaged in the study of China-Africa relations. Many of your constructive suggestions and opinions have boosted China-Africa relations, and many of your work have enhanced the exchanges between think tanks and academic communities of China and African countries, and the mutual understanding between our people. I truly appreciate all that you have done.

In two weeks' time, we are going to have the fifth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. This is the first FOCAC Ministerial Conference in the second decade of the 21st century. Once again, African and Chinese leaders and ministers will have the chance to get together and draw the blueprint of China-Africa cooperation for the next three years. Therefore, it is highly relevant that we gather here today, review the history of China-Africa relations and look into the future prospects of this relationship.

China and Africa have achieved greatly in our bilateral relations over the past 50-odd years, especially since the establishment of FOCAC in the year 2000. Our cooperation is so fruitful and successful that the whole world is getting ever more interested. But how does China view its relationship with Africa? I think I would like to divide it into three questions, and try to answer them with three stories, and hope, through this, offering the audience a better understanding of the Chinese perspective.

First, what is China's perception of Africa?

The answer is, to China, Africa is a continent full of hope, vitality and potentials. We regard Africa as our good friend, good brother and good partner. And here is the first example: the high-level exchanges between the two sides are so close that it's like relatives visiting each other.

We know that high-level visits usually speak for the extent of political trust and the closeness between states. By this token, the number of Chinese state leaders' visits to Africa is far more than that of any other Africa's partners. President Hu Jintao has paid 4 state visits to Africa, covering 18 African countries – and this makes him one of the most frequent visitors to Africa as a head of state of a foreign country.

What impressed me most is the visit that President Hu paid to Africa in the beginning of the year 2007, through which he pushed for the implementation of the 8 policy measures for China-Africa cooperation that he himself announced during the FOCAC Beijing Summit. Our president spent 12 days, travelled 38,000 kilometers and visited South Africa and other 7 African countries. This visit was applauded as a “trip of friendship and cooperation”, and has greatly enhanced China-Africa relations.

Actually, the top leadership of China, including the President, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and Premier of the State Council, has all visited South Africa in recent years. At the same time, South African President, Deputy President and Speaker of the National Assembly have also paid visits to China. These frequent exchanges of high-level visits have brought us closer and expanded and deepened our cooperation in various fields.

Visiting Africa during a Chinese Foreign Minister's first overseas trip of the year is a practice that has been followed for the past 20 years. At the same time, every year, China receives more than 10 heads of state or government of African countries in the past decade.

More African countries are now “Looking East”, demonstrating strong will to deepen cooperation with China and learn from China's development experience in order to accelerate their own economic and social progress. High-level changes have therefore enabled close communication and coordination on state governance as well as bilateral, regional and international issues of common concern. Such visits have also strengthened mutual understanding and support on issues concerning each other's major and core interests, and enhanced the political mutual trust between China and Africa.

The second question is: What has China been doing in Africa?

The rapid expansion of China-Africa cooperation has increased China's influence in Africa, but at the same time, given rise to certain questions and suspicion, as sometimes we see from media coverage that “China is plundering

Africa's resources" or "the Chinese people have taken away African jobs". What exactly has China been doing in Africa? Let me answer the question with the second example.

Hua Jian is a big Chinese shoe-making company. It was invited by the Ethiopian government in September 2011 to set up a shoe-making factory in the country. The Company then made careful arrangement and provided training courses in China for the newly-recruited local employees. Within 3 months, a brand-new shoe-making factory was established in Addis Ababa, creating 600 new local jobs. The leather shoes that they make enter the US market with label saying: "Made in Ethiopia".

Hua Jian's is only one of the many Chinese companies that are now investing in Africa, setting up their business presence and promoting China-Africa economic cooperation. Up to date, China has become the largest trading partner of Africa, and Africa – China's fourth largest destination of overseas investment and second largest market of outsourcing engineering contracting.

The trade volume between China and Africa has soared from a little over US\$10 billion in 2000 to US\$166.3 billion in 2011. China's investment in Africa of various kinds exceeds US\$40 billion, among which US\$14.7 billion is direct investment. There are over 2,000 Chinese enterprises doing business in nearly 50 African countries, covering a wide range of areas such as mining, financing, manufacturing, construction, tourism and agriculture.

Take South Africa for example. There are dozens of major Chinese companies operating in the country. While we all know South Africa is currently suffering high unemployment, SinoSteel alone creates nearly 4,000 jobs for local people, which has not only helped the South African government to battle unemployment, but also contributed greatly to local economic development.

In addition to business cooperation, China remains committed to offering assistance to African countries. A great number of schools and hospitals are built to improve local people's well-being, and infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, bridges and water supply systems have also been completed with Chinese assistance. Each of these "China aid" projects is like a shining star that decorates the beautiful night sky of the African continent. Statistics show that China-Africa economic cooperation and trade now drives around 20% of African economic growth.

Prime Minister Meles of Ethiopia once said, and I quote: China's

involvement in the continent's infrastructure building is "fundamental and transformative". When meeting with President Hu Jintao during Los Cabos G20 Summit last month, he praised China's sincere support and assistance to Africa, and regarded China as an important partner in the development and renaissance of the African continent.

The third question I'd like to pose is :What is the driving force behind China-Africa friendship?

Ancient Chinese wrote that "amity between people holds the key to the sound relations between countries". The profound friendship is indeed the inexhaustible source of our centuries-old relationship and the force that drives the growth of the relations.

Here comes the third example, something that happened in South Africa. Recently our Embassy received a letter of thanks from South African local community, praising Li Weichong and his brother Li Weijin for their active engagement with South African local communities. They set up a vegetable farm that not only produces high-quality vegetables to local market but also creates several dozens of jobs for local people. And more importantly, they share everything they know about vegetable cultivation with local people, whole-heartedly promoting common prosperity with the local community. Their story is another legacy of China-South Africa and China-Africa friendship.

With the development of China-Africa relations, exchanges between the people have become a vital part. The Chinese government has attached great importance to people-to-people and cultural exchanges between China and Africa, actively helped Chinese and African people to meet with each other, know each other, and become friends with each other, so that everyone would advocate, participate in and promote China-Africa relations.

Thanks to the efforts from both sides, cooperation projects such as the China-Africa Young Leaders Forum, People's Forum and Think Tank Forum, the China-Africa Joint Research and Exchange Plan, Chinese Culture in Focus and the 20 plus 20 Cooperation Plan for Chinese and African Institutions of Higher Education have all been implemented in a steady manner. The second China-Africa Young Leaders Forum was concluded successfully in Beijing not long ago, and the second China-Africa People's Forum will be held as a sideline event of the fifth FOCAC Ministerial Conference this month in China.

So far, China has offered more than 20,000 government scholarships to African students, trained over 30,000 African professionals and sent to Africa

more than 350,000 technicians, young volunteers and agricultural experts. With Chinese language enjoying rising popularity in Africa, Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms have been set up across Africa. In South Africa alone, there are 3 Confucius Institutes and 1 Confucius Classroom.

Many African football players are now playing in China, and some Zambian, Ghanaian and Guinean players have scored brilliantly in China's Super League and become stars among Chinese football fans. The South African Moroka Swallows Football Club took part in the 2012 Shanghai International Tournament last June, making itself the first South African football team to visit China after the establishment of China-SA diplomatic relations and was warmly received by Chinese people.

All in all, the people-to-people and cultural exchanges between China and Africa have significantly reinforced mutual understanding and friendship. The amity is now deeply rooted in the hearts of the people from both sides.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

China-Africa friendship has stood the test of time and geographical distance. It is booming with even greater vitality despite the vicissitudes of the changing international situation. According to my observation, I think the following five factors have played a vital role.

First, traditional friendship as the foundation.

The China-Africa relationship is a centuries-old journey. China and Africa were in contact with each other as early as in about the 2nd century B.C. and direct marine trade started in the 1st century A.D. Chinese navigator Zheng He of the 15th century led fleets to the eastern coast of Africa, visiting places what is today Somalia, Kenya and Mozambique. Instead of establishing colonies or engaging in slave trade like western colonists of the time, Zheng He traded goods with local people and introduced the Chinese culture.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese government and people have firmly stood with the African people in your fight for national independence, and in your endeavor pursuing national development. African countries have also rendered China precious support on the restoration of our legitimate seat in the United Nations and many other important issues concerning China's core interest.

There is a Chinese saying goes, “as distance can test a horse’s strength, so time can reveal a person’s heart”. China and Africa have established strong friendship through exchanges over time and have become good friends, good brothers and good partners. This traditional friendship is the foundation supporting our relationship. It is our common heritage.

Second, strict observance of principles as the premise.

China and Africa have been committed to the principles of mutual respect, equality and common development in our cooperation. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and African countries over 50 years ago, China has been strictly following its African policy. In the political aspect, we uphold mutual respect and equality. We have never interfered into African countries’ internal affairs and always respected their independent choice of development path. In the economic aspect, we pursue mutual benefit and common development. None of China’s assistance to Africa is attached with political conditions and priority has been given to helping African countries develop on their own. In the cultural and people-to-people area, we advocate the mutual learning and harmonious coexistence between our two civilizations. China’s African policy has been recognized and appreciated by African countries and has therefore promoted the sustainable development of China-Africa relations.

Third, common interest as the bonding tie.

To enhance China-Africa relations serves the common interest of both sides. China is the world’s largest developing country and Africa is home to the largest number of developing countries. We have similar historical experiences, face similar tasks of development and have the same or similar concerns in international affairs. China-Africa cooperation will give play to the respective advantages of both sides and achieve win-win outcome and common development. It could also strengthen the unity among developing countries, advocate democracy in international relations and safeguard the interests of developing countries as a whole. Such common interest is the internal force that drives the growth of China-Africa relations.

Fourth, innovation as the energy.

The establishment of FOCAC is the greatest creation of China-Africa relations. It has been gradually improved to a mechanism that will further promote China-Africa cooperation. With the development of China-Africa relations, many of the policy measures that China has announced under this framework have greatly benefited China-Africa cooperation, such as debt relief

and tariff-free treatment, increase of aid and investment, expansion of human resources training programs and the establishment of such projects as China-Africa Development Fund, Science and Technology Partnership Program and Joint Research and Exchange Program.

Fifth, openness and inclusiveness as the feature.

Over the past decade, Africa has undergone rapid economic development, turning itself from a Lost Continent to A Rising Star. This is first a result of Africa's own endeavor, but should also be attributed to the participation and assistance from the international community. China-Africa cooperation is an integral part of such international cooperation. China has adopted an open and inclusive attitude regarding Africa's cooperation with other countries. We have actively engaged in exchanges with other relevant parties to learn from others' experience. It is fair to say that China-Africa cooperation has promoted the international cooperation with Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear Friends,

China-Africa cooperation has greatly benefited the two sides. The fruitful achievement has reinforced our determination and confidence to expand this cooperation. The international situation is now undergoing profound and complicated changes, so as China and Africa. This has brought us both challenges and opportunities.

As for China, we are now actively implementing the "Twelfth Five Year Plan", which allows us to enhance and improve macro-economic control, stabilize economic growth, adjust the structure, improve people's livelihood, carry out the reforms and advocate harmony of the society. Economic situation is generally sound and stable in China.

At the same time, unbalanced, uncoordinated and unsustainable contradictions are still prominent in China's economic development. We will remain committed to the concept of scientific development, accelerate the change of pattern of economic growth, continue with the proactive fiscal policy and prudent monetary policy to ensure the continuity and stability of macro-economic policies. We will also make our macro-control more targeted, flexible and forward-looking, continue to maintain a balance among economic development, economic restructuring and the management of inflation expectations, expand domestic demand, promote steady and relatively fast economic development, keep overall price basically stable and ensure social

harmony and stability.

As for Africa, you are now entering a new period of rapid growth. According to the International Monetary Fund, seven African countries are among the top ten fastest growing countries in the world in the next five years. African countries are actively advancing infrastructure construction, vigorously developing basic industries such as agriculture and manufacturing, and promoting the industrialization process.

China and Africa are both at the crucial stage of economic and social transformation. As the two sides are exploring more business complementarities and demonstrating stronger will for cooperation, future cooperation is expected to be even more promising.

However, we should be keenly aware of the severe world economic situation. The European debt crisis keeps deteriorating, economic recovery of developed countries is rather slow and emerging economies are facing difficulties in economic development. The underlying impact of the turmoil in West Asia and North Africa is gradually emerging. In addition, public opinion and media coverage of China-Africa cooperation is rather complicated. There are always people observing China-Africa relations through colored-glasses with the Cold War mentality, posing groundless criticism and attacks against China-Africa cooperation. Such practices have disturbed the sound and stable development momentum of China- Africa cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

I believe that China-Africa relations will see more opportunities than challenges in the coming decade. This relationship is solidly based on friendship and cooperation. It remains top on the agenda of our leaderships, and our two peoples are very supportive and passionate in advancing this relationship. Therefore, we have every reason to be confident about its future prospects. Here, I wish to share with you some of my observations on how to bring China-Africa relations to a higher level.

First, we should strengthen the unity. As the Chinese saying goes, “Brothers with one heart can break gold.” The strength of Africa lies in the unity among African countries, and China-Africa relations also derive energy from the unity of the two sides.

No matter how the world changes, China and Africa should always remain good friends, good brothers and good partners. We should protect and develop

our traditional friendship, respect each other, treat each other as equals and remain committed to mutual benefit, win-win outcome and common development. We should consolidate political mutual trust and promote China-Africa unity. We should give special attention to enhancing exchanges among youth so that our friendship can be passed on from generation to generation.

Second, we should facilitate all-round cooperation. To expand converging interests will ensure the sustainable growth of China-Africa relations. Therefore, while business cooperation remains a priority, we should, at the same time, enhance our cooperation in such areas as education, science and technology, and culture, as this will enrich the content of the “new type of strategic partnership between China and Africa”. It is inevitable that we may encounter some “growing pains” along the process. Yet we should be objective and pragmatic, and try to address such issues through friendly consultation and enhanced cooperation.

Third, we should strengthen FOCAC institutional building. FOCAC has contributed a lot to the development of China-Africa relations in the past decade, and will remain the flag guiding the development of our relations in the coming decade. We should adopt an innovative and pioneering spirit, take the fifth FOCAC Ministerial Conference as another opportunity to explore new ways and means to develop this Forum and, at the same time, work to unite the members and enhance the influence.

While promoting bilateral cooperation under the framework of FOCAC, we should also expand exchanges and cooperation between China and regional organizations in Africa, and actively explore the feasible ways for China to participate in transnational and trans-regional infrastructure construction in Africa.

Fourth, we should deepen mutual trust and enhance mutual understanding between the people. Chinese and African people harbor simple but friendly sentiments towards each other. But there is a lack of in-depth understanding. Some western politicians and media also tend to make irresponsible remarks on China-Africa relations, attempting to mess up with our cooperation.

However, “Seeing is believing”. We sincerely invite more African friends to visit China, to see more about China’s development and feel the passion of Chinese people. We also hope our African friends who have already been to China can share your experience with people around you, so that we can work together to enable a more objective and fair perception of China-Africa

relations. In this respect, I believe SAIIA will continue to play an important role in facilitating academic exchanges and promoting mutual understanding between the people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

The coming fifth FOCAC Ministerial Conference is an important opportunity for the further development of China-Africa relations in the second decade of the new century.

The Conference has taken the theme of “build on past achievements and open new prospects for the New Type of China-Africa Strategic Partnership”. It will review China-Africa relations of the past three years and evaluate the implementation of policy measures announced during the fourth Ministerial Conference. Participants to the Conference will discuss the new situations and new tasks facing China-Africa cooperation, try to reach consensus on the current international situation and major international and regional issues and draw the blueprint for China-Africa cooperation in the next three years.

Two important documents will be adopted by the Conference: the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Action Plan 2013-2015, and a set of new policy measures will be announced to promote China-Africa cooperation. I’m convinced that, with the joint efforts from both sides, the Conference will be a crowning success.

In 2009, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao quoted an African proverb when addressing the opening ceremony of the fourth FOCAC Ministerial Conference, that “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” There is also a Chinese saying that goes, “When everybody adds fuel, the flames rise high”. I am fully confident that as long as China and Africa go hand in hand with an enterprising spirit, we will enable a brighter future of China-Africa relations.

Thank you!