

Jointly Building the Belt and Road for Win-Win Development —by H.E. Amb. Lin Songtian of China to South Africa

23 November 2018 Wits University

First of all, I wish to thank the Wits University for hosting this BRI conference where so many government and party officials, think tank experts, business leaders and media friends can gather together to exchange on what is the Belt and Road Initiative, how is the BRI going on, and how to synergize the BRI with Africa's development. I think the theme and agenda for this conference address timely the interests and concerns of the international community, particularly of the African people. It demonstrates the global perspective and strategic vision of the Wits University under the leadership of Vice Chancellor Adam Habib. I look forward to a very fruitful exchange to build consensus and wisdom to contribute to better synergizing the BRI with African development.

Facing a profoundly changing world over the recent years, some visionary leaders, strategists in the world, and all the peoples of the world are looking tirelessly for the correct answers to two fundamental issues—First, where for the world to go? Second, how to build a more beautiful and better world? To answer these two major issues of our times, the Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the Belt and Road Initiative 5 years ago, based on the Chinese history, China's successful practice of peaceful development, and the practical need of China to open up further for better development, and with the view to jointly build a more beautiful world and a better life for us all.

Drawing wisdom from the ancient Silk Road spirit, the BRI advocates for 3 together, that is planning together, building together, and sharing together for 5 connectivities in policy, infrastructure, trade, finance, and people-to-people exchange, so as to achieve win-win cooperation for common development, and build a community of shared future for mankind.

Over 2,000 years ago, the Chinese people crossed from Asia to Europe, marking the beginning of the ancient Silk Road. Over 600 years ago, during the Ming Dynasty, the great Chinese navigator Zheng He led 6 voyages with an unbeatable fleet, into the Pacific and across the Indian Ocean, reaching as far as the eastern coast Africa on 3 expeditions. Whether it was over land or across the seas, the Chinese people had brought porcelains, teas, and silk products to the overseas, while bringing back local products. It is through these ancient roads of friendly exchanges and mutual respect that we had developed the Silk Road spirit of "peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit".

Unlike the Western colonialists, the Chinese never used force to conquer or bully anyone, or occupy a single inch of land of any other country. 600 years ago, China's GDP accounted for more than half of the world's total. China achieved its development and got strong by our own hard work and peaceful cooperation and open development with the world, but never through war and looting as some Western countries did.

In the past 40 years, under the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), China has remained firmly committed to reform and opening up and peaceful development. By achieving an average annual growth rate of 9.5%, China's GDP has increased by over 30 folds. China's per capita GDP has increased from 227 US dollars in 1978 to about 9,000 US dollars in 2017. Today, China is the world's second largest economy, the largest manufacturing power, the largest exporter of goods, and the holder of the biggest foreign exchange reserve. China's contribution to world economic growth exceeds 30%, more than the contribution of all developed countries combined. Over the years, 740 million people have been lifted out of poverty, creating a miracle in the history of human development.

To uphold durable world peace and realize sustainable development serves the common interests of all countries, meets the common aspirations of all peoples, and of course is the joint responsibility of all governments. The Chinese President Xi Jinping often says that, only when the world is going well can China get better. He requests China to connect the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation closely with the dream of the world for a happy and better life, so as to build an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity.

It is easy to see that the BRI is an initiative with distinct Chinese features, but also bears the unique characteristics of our times. It has become the world's most popular international public goods and a most important platform for win-win cooperation. The BRI is completely different from the Western colonialism and the Marshall Plan.

The BRI focuses on economic development and does not engage in the export of politics. It aims to address the bottleneck issues that restrain economic and social development to build 5 connectivities for common development. The BRI does not export ideologies, does not attach political strings, and does not seek the politics of a small circle.

The BRI is committed to open cooperation and rejects protectionism. There is no geographical or ideological barriers to participate in the BRI. Any country or region are welcome to join, as long as they agree with and follow the principle of "3 together" and committed themselves to building "5 connectivities". In the BRI cooperation, there is no coercion, no forced buying or sale, no trade protectionism, and certainly there is no such thing called "China first" or "China only".

The BRI seeks for win-win cooperation for common development and rejects zero sum game. The BRI aims to joining efforts to enlarge the cake through integrated economy, interconnected development and shared cooperation results, so as to achieve win-win development through complementing each others' comparative strengths instead of the winner taking all.

The Marshall Plan is a product of the Cold War and drawn the line based on ideology and geopolitics, resulting in a man-made conflicts and division of the world into the West versus the East. Countries are grouped as either an ally or a foe. The BRI is open for all, regardless of national strength or social systems. What it strives for is to build a community of shared future for mankind by 3 together for 5 connectivities.

The Belt and Road Initiative begins with China, but belongs to the whole world. Over the past 5 years, the BRI has transformed from idea into actions and from vision into reality, producing visible and tangible results. 113 countries and 29 international organizations have signed BRI cooperation documents with China. The BRI has been written into the UN resolution. From 2013 to 2017, China's imports from the Belt and Road countries has registered 6.97 trillion US dollars. Today, more than 10 China-Europe freight trains run between China and Europe on a daily basis, greatly boosting trade across the regions. In total, the train service has already completed over 10,000 trips.

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) proposed by China with 100 billion US dollars of capitalization is open to the world for infrastructure investment financing. The AIIB has approved investment for projects worth over 5.3 billion US dollars since it started operations, and has further driven over 30 billion US dollars of public and private investment into infrastructure development. Many countries have benefited from the foreign investment brought by these projects through local jobs creation and tax revenue. The Silk Road Fund with 40 billion US dollar established by China has already supported projects totaling 80 billion US dollars.

We are happy to see that in Africa, the African Union and 37 African countries have already signed documents on BRI cooperation with China. The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway are already in full operation. These railways have effectively promoted corridors of fast industrial development. Ethiopia has achieved a double-digit GDP growth. In Kenya, the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway has created nearly 50,000 jobs and contributed 1.5% annual GDP growth. We believe these successful examples offer a new model for connecting the BRI with Africa's development.

Africa is a continent full of hope. It is blessed with rich natural and human resources, and a nearly 1.3 billion population huge market. The 21st century is a century not only for Asia , but also for Africa. A peaceful, stable, and prosperous Africa is not only in the fundamental interests of the world, but also the shared responsibility of the international community. For Africa, if it is not independent economically, it is hard to be independent politically. To achieve self-sustainable development, Africa must break 3 development bottlenecks, namely backward infrastructure, lack of professional and skilled personnel, and short of capital sources. I strongly believe, whoever can truly help Africa break these 3 bottlenecks to achieve self-sustainable development are the true friends and reliable cooperation partners of Africa.

China and Africa have always been a community with a shared future. Over the years, we have always respected each other as equals and stood together through thick and thin. H.E. President Xi Jinping attaches great importance to China-Africa relations. In the last 5 years, President Xi has made 4 state visits to African countries and has co-chaired two of the three FOCAC Summits. During the FOCAC Beijing Summit in September, President Xi held formal bilateral meetings with all 53 heads of visiting African delegations.

In 2015, President Xi proposed the China-Africa Ten Major Cooperative Plans, and in 2018, he put forward new Eight Major Initiatives together with 60 billion US dollars of financial support respectively, with an only aim to support Africa to break the 3 bottlenecks to achieve industrialization and agricultural modernization.

China-Africa cooperation has now entered a new era of win-win cooperation for common development. In this new era, guided by the principle of 3 TOGETHERS, China is ready to work with Africa to synergize the BRI with African development strategies for 5 CONNECTIVITIES. We will fully implement the Eight Major Initiatives to support African countries to develop 5 networks of railways, highways, power grids, air transport, and telecommunication to promote African industrialization, agricultural modernization, urbanization, and digitalization.

Now, to connect the BRI with Africa facing two major challenges. First, there is a lack of full understanding of the BRI in Africa. What is the principle and concept of the BRI and how to connect the BRI with Africa and benefit from it? Second, some people and countries in the West don't like and are fearful to see China supporting African countries to achieve independence politically and economically. As a result, they will never cease fabricating and playing up stories of so-called "Chinese neocolonialism", "debt trap", "lack of investment transparency" and so on. But truth will always prevail. We strongly believe, the African people are wise and mature enough to make their own and correct conclusion based on facts.

As the comprehensive strategic partner, both China and South Africa are playing growing important roles in our own regions, and maintain close cooperation across four major platforms, including FOCAC, BRICS, BRI, and South-South Cooperation. With rich resources, superb location and better development foundation and conditions, South Africa was among the first African countries to sign the BRI MOU with China. China has been committed ourselves to work together with South Africa to become another BRI pilot country in Africa as Ethiopia, Kenya, to achieve early and more visible and fruitful results for our two peoples, and to show the success to the rest of Africa and beyond.

I am full of confidence for the bright prospect for China-South Africa and China-Africa BRI cooperation to achieve win-win development. Let us join hands together to build an even closer China-Africa community with a shared future by jointly connecting the Belt and Road with Africa to bring happiness and a better life to all of our peoples.