

The 2018 Beijing FOCAC Summit in the Eyes of an African

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Since its establishment in 2000, The forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has gradually become a major platform of dialogue and concertation between China and African countries. Following the Challenges of our times and in view of the needs of expanding China-Africa relations, China and Africa upgraded both the Third Ministerial Conference of FOCAC, held in November 2006 in Beijing, and the Sixth Ministerial Conference, held in December 2015 in Johannesburg, to FOCAC Summits. The present 2018 edition of the summit held in Beijing the September 4th, has been the first ever to gather 40 top leaderships of Africa around the table with the Chinese leadership led by president Xi Jinping, under the witness eyes of its Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations. Some questions have come to mind on the motives on such massive participation of Africans leaders and their exceptions from their Chinese counterpart.

From an African perspective, it's clear that the continent of Africa on the firm will of its people and leadership, is determined than ever to join the stage of the world economy and modernization. There's a pressing need for Africa to industrialize and improve the livelihood of its people. After more than half a century of independence from western colonization, African countries still strive to shape a development model proper to their needs and expectations. Meanwhile China that has undergone western imperialism as well, seems to have become a successful story and could serve as a reference for African countries. Despite of this historical fate between both parties, the status quo of international geopolitics undermined by the isolationism, unilateralism, and imperialists intentions of some major global players is driving China and African countries even closer to each other. This could explain the massive gathering between the leaders and representatives of the FOCAC members countries in Beijing, including the three new members who, since the last summit of December 2015 in Johannesburg established diplomatic relationship with Beijing in accordance with the one China policy.

The opening ceremony of this seventh FOCAC summit in Beijing was marked by the comprehensive and inclusive speech of the Chinese president to his Africans

counterparts; a speech that seems to fully expressed the urgent needs of the continent with respect of international laws, mutual respect and the spirit of win-win cooperation. In fact, the following points highlighted by president Xi are of core interests for the people of Africa:

Firstly and most importantly, the "*Five-No*" approach". *No interference in African countries' pursuit of development paths that fit their national conditions; no interference in African countries' internal affairs; no imposition of our (the Chinese people) will on African countries; no attachment of political strings to assistance to Africa; no seeking of selfish political gains in investment and financing cooperation with Africa.*

It is to be noticed that western neocolonialism partly responsible of Africa's underdevelopment have been sown and fueled up by interference in African affairs as well as political strings attached on western aids. China as victim of imperialism itself, have chosen a different path in its cooperation with Africa. The brotherhood and friendship between both parties is historical and can be traced back to 2000 years ago. Perhaps it suffices to mentioned the Egyptian acrobats who reached China around 112 B.C during the Han Dynasty, or the mid-8th century Tang dynasty Wang Duhuan (recorded as the first Chinese to Africa). One can also mentioned the historical vote that granted China a seat in the U.N as permanent member, determined by their African Brothers. These are among others, various proofs of the long standing friendship between both sides and that China has never and is not engaging in the same path as western countries in dealing with African countries. And for the detractors working themselves hard to turn the China-Africa relationship upside down, President Xi's speech has been very straightforward through the "*Four No-One*": *No one could undermine the great unity between the Chinese people and the African people. No one could hold back the Chinese people or the African people as we march toward rejuvenation. No one could deny the remarkable achievements made in China-Africa cooperation, not with their assumption or imagination. No one could stand in the way or obstruct international efforts to support Africa's development.*

It appears crystal clear that only Chinese and Africans have the mostly right of expression on the China-Africa cooperation. Furthermore, president Xi strongly advocate the idea of community with a shared future as to be the backbone of pursuing the China-Africa common destiny, he therefore quoted a Chinese saying: "*The ocean is vast because it rejects no rivers.*" Under the guidance of core interests of both parties, the Belt and Road Initiative, the AU Agenda 2063 as well as the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the development programs of African countries could better complement each other.

Finally the "*Eight Major Initiatives*" proposed by president Xi at the end of his speech drawn rounds of applauds among the African leaders and government

representatives, namely: *Industrial promotion, Infrastructure connectivity, Trade facilitation, Green development, Capacity building, Health care, People-to-people exchanges, Peace and security*. To achieve these great initiatives, China has pledged \$60 billion in support to African countries in term of finance and investment through institutions such as The Export-Import Bank of China, The New Development Bank (formerly referred to as the BRICS Development Bank), and many other financial resources and institutions available.

In conclusion, the 2018 FOCAC summit in Beijing is a big step toward development and strategic partnership between China and 53 members of the FOCAC. China has demonstrated a firm will to elevate the partnership with African countries to a new stage. This is beyond doubt a golden opportunity for the people of Africa in their struggle for development and prosperity, on the other hand, it is a unique opportunity for China in its commitment for a fair and better world of shared future for mankind. China has reached a level of maturity in technological advancement and skillful labor force in search for new markets to expand its products and services; meanwhile Africa blessed with untapped resources and a fast growing population is pursuing industrialization and skills learning, this is a perfect combination for limitless opportunities between both sides. A sincere partnership based on mutual respect and win-win cooperation is the most needed incentive to sparkled a new era of China-Africa relationship history.