

Build a Rainbow Bridge of People-to-People Exchange and Create a China-South Africa Community of Shared Future



As culturally diverse and multi-ethnic countries, China and South Africa should all the more cherish the diversity of human civilisation and cultures, draw on each other's strengths, seek commonalities while shelving differences, and set up an inspiring model for exchange between the Chinese and African civilisations.

By Liu Yandong

I am pleased to come to Pretoria in such a beautiful season. It will be Freedom Day in South Africa in two days' time. This will be a great occasion to celebrate the spirit of fighting for freedom championed by Nelson Mandela and other political leaders, a spirit that still inspires our world today.

I am happy to join friends both old and new in the Rainbow Nation today to witness the official launch of China-South Africa High Level People-to-People Exchange Mechanism (PPEM). Setting up such a mechanism has been a visionary decision made by President Xi Jinping and President Jacob Zuma and marked a milestone in the history of people-to-people ties and overall state-to-state relations between our countries.

Here, on behalf of the Chinese government, I wish to express heartfelt thanks to the government of South Africa for its thoughtful arrangements and extend best wishes to all those who have long been committed to China-South Africa friendship.

The congratulatory messages from President Xi and President Zuma speak volumes about the degree of importance our two governments attach to China-South Africa people-to-people exchanges and put forth high expectations on both our teams, which is deeply inspiring to all of us.

The FOCAC Johannesburg Summit held in South Africa in December 2015 was the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation summit to take place on the African continent in the 15 years of the Forum. As the host country, South Africa presented the world a "perfect and extraordinary" Summit and ushered in a new era of win-win cooperation and common development for China and Africa. During the Summit, leaders from China and African countries agreed to upgrade China-Africa relationships to a comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership and identified "mutually enriching cultural exchanges" as one of the five major pillars supporting China-Africa relations and "cultural and people-to-people plan", as one of the ten China-Africa cooperation plans. The message is clear: We should pursue closer cultural interactions, policy coordination and people-to-people

exchanges to advance common progress and ensure the sustained growth of China-Africa friendship from generation to generation.

Today, we are here to inaugurate the PPEM. This is a major step forward in the implementation of the outcomes of FOCAC Johannesburg Summit and the first such high-level intergovernmental platform between China and an African country aimed at promoting people-to-people exchanges. It is yet another milestone in the growth of both China-South Africa relationship and China-Africa cooperation.

Despite the long distance between China and South Africa, interactions between our peoples go back to ancient times and the river of friendship runs a long course. We were bonded together by our shared cause and common pursuit. Ceramics from China were

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discovered on the site of the ancient Kingdom of Mapungubwe, which flourished as early as 1,000 years ago in what is today's South Africa. Over 400 years ago, a group of Chinese craftsmen and skilled workmen arrived in South Africa, opening the door of direct interaction between the two sides.

People in China and Africa have common memories of standing in solidarity during the fight against colonialism and pursuit of national independence in the 20th century. The Chinese people firmly supported the just cause of the South African people against apartheid, forming deep bonds of solidarity and mutual support in this process. Chairman Mao Zedong cared much about South African people's struggle against racist rule. In May

1954, he sent a message to express full support for their just position of fighting for democratic rights and opposing racial discrimination and oppression.

The 21st century has witnessed ever closer interactions between the Chinese Dream and the African Dream and ever broader people-to-people exchanges between our countries. During South Africa's hosting of the FIFA World Cup in 2010, players were cheered on by African drumbeats and vuvuzelas made in China. In the same year, China hosted the World Expo, in which the South African pavilion entitled "Rise of A Modern Economy--Ke Nako!" presented a colourful and modern South Africa after apartheid.

Inspired by our time-tested friendship, China and South Africa have been committed to developing our special relationship as one between comrades and brothers. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1998, our bilateral relationship has developed across the board and has been upgraded from a partnership to a strategic partnership, and then to a comprehensive strategic partnership. The past five years saw two visits by President Xi to South Africa, three visits by President Zuma to China, numerous meetings between the two presidents on bilateral and multilateral occasions, and in-depth exchanges between Premier Li Keqiang and President Zuma. Our bilateral relationship has maintained a strong momentum and kept enriching itself. It is now in its best time ever. Under the *China-South Africa Five-to-Ten Year Strategic Programme for Cooperation* signed in 2014, the two sides conducted wide-ranging cooperation in areas such as industrialisation, special economic zones, marine economy, infrastructure, human resource development, finance and culture. With a two-way trade volume of 35.3 billion US dollars, China has been South Africa's largest trading partner for eight consecutive years. As important members of BRICS and the G20, China and South Africa have been making joint contributions to China-Africa cooperation, South-South cooperation and global governance, serving as an example for solidarity and cooperation between China and Africa and between major developing

countries.

It is delightful to see how our people-to-people exchanges have blossomed alongside enhanced political mutual trust and closer economic cooperation. South Africa hosts more Chinese students, Confucius institutes and classrooms and has more sister provinces and cities with China than any other African country. It is one of the most popular destinations in Africa for Chinese tourists and the first country on the African continent to include Chinese teaching in its national education system. Positive progress has also been made in the setting-up of cultural centres in each other's countries, the building of scientific parks and exchanges of scientific personnel. The Year of South Africa was successfully held in China in 2014, so was the Year of China in South Africa in 2015. Both were jointly designated by President Xi and President Zuma as flagship programmes and national level platforms for people-to-people exchanges. The Year of China in South Africa set a record of over 200 events and the participation of about 100,000 people. South Africa's dance and wine is getting popular among the Chinese people, while China's Peking Opera and martial arts have drawn more and more South African fans. Many young South Africans choose to work and live in China. In 2015, a documentary entitled *South Africans in China* was released in Beijing, which vividly recorded the real life of 12 South Africans in China and showcased the friendly exchanges and bond between ordinary people of the two countries. One of them is Byron Jacobs living in Beijing. He came to China to learn martial arts, became the best student of his Chinese teacher, and is now campaigning to include martial arts in Olympic competition.

Mr. Nelson Mandela once said that "even the most fantastic dreams can be achieved if we are prepared to endure life's challenges." Inspired by the story of Nelson Mandela, Chinese artists wrote the song *Glorious Years* in the early 1990s, which was hugely popular and became a classic among the Chinese. As its lyrics read, "Can we make no boundaries between colours? On this earth, don't make distinctions

between you and I. A riotous diffusion of colours emits beauty." It is said that Mr. Mandela was quite moved when hearing the song. This well testifies to the unique power of cultural exchanges which can easily transcend time and space and touch the very heart of the people.

Mutual understanding is essential for amity among the people, which in turn holds the key to state-to-state relations. During his visit to Africa four years ago, President Xi put forth China's Africa policy featuring "sincerity, being result-oriented, affinity and good faith" and pointed out that "the foundation and lifeline of China-Africa relations lie with the people", and it is important to "strike a chord in our hearts" through dialogue and actions. Only with a strong bond between the peoples can our two countries enjoy closer ties and greater sincerity, get stronger popular

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support for our comprehensive strategic partnership, and ensure sound growth of our bilateral relations in the years to come. The PPEM will create a broader and stronger "bridge of rainbow" for friendship between our two peoples. This bridge, connecting the Asian and African continents and our two great civilisations, will bring our people-to-people exchanges to a brand new stage.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends,

The world we live in today is undergoing profound changes. Uneven development, lack of growth momentum, inadequate global governance, terrorism, the backlash against globalisation and rising protectionism are affecting global peace and development. At the same time, industrialisation and urbanisation

in emerging economies continue to move forward. Transformations brought by new technologies continue to unfold, and new opportunities for integrated development are in the making for the global economy. In his speech at the UN Office at Geneva earlier this year, President Xi raised the profound questions of what kind of world we need to build and how to build it. To answer these questions, he gave a comprehensive and systematic overview of the concept of building a community of shared future for mankind as an ideal blueprint for the future of human society, presenting China's proposal and vision in this regard.

This concept of a community of shared future has been well borne out in the relationship between China and Africa. This is also true when it comes to relations between China and South Africa. Facing common challenges and opportunities, our two countries have been "distant neighbours", and each other's important partners on the same journey.

China has come a long way in the past 38 years. Thanks to reform and opening up, it became the world's second largest economy. It has lifted more than 700 million people out of poverty and delivered a better life for its people. In 2016 alone, over ten million Chinese people were lifted out of poverty. In the coming five years, China aims to create over 50 million new urban jobs and bring down the number of people living in poverty by another 40 million and more. It is expected to import over 8 trillion US dollars-worth of goods and invest more than 750 billion US dollars overseas, and its people are expected to make more than 700 million outbound visits. Having achieved high-speed growth for over 30 years, China has come to a challenging phase where it needs to shift the gear of growth and conduct profound structural adjustments in order to enhance its growth quality and efficiency and upgrade its economy. The Chinese people are striving in unison to realise the "two centenary goals" and the Chinese dream of the great renewal of the Chinese nation.

At the annual sessions of the National People's Congress and the

Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference held last month, objectives for China's economic and social development were laid out for 2017, an important year for implementing China's 13th Five-Year Plan. It is also the year when the Communist Party of China will hold its 19th National Congress.

In this important year, we will continue to focus on development as the top priority and strive for higher quality and efficiency of development. We will maintain steady progress, pursue innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development, embrace and guide the new normal of economic growth, and advance supply-side structural reform.

We will continue to put people at the centre of development and work to improve their well-being. To this end, we will deliver more benefits to the people, ensure that they take ownership of the development process and promote their all-round development.

We will stay committed to innovation as the primary driver of development. That is why we are planning major projects on scientific and technological innovation oriented toward 2030, launching a pilot reform on all-round innovation, and building major national scientific and technological infrastructure and technological innovation centres. In addition, we are vigorously promoting business start-ups and innovation by the general public in order to build up new driving forces for development.

Internationally, China will integrate into the world with greater openness and share with other countries its development opportunities. The Belt and Road Initiative put forth by President Xi in the autumn of 2013 follows the principles of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, and aims to realise green development, public health improvement, think tank cooperation and advancement of peace along the routes. All countries are welcome to board the "fast train" of China's development. So far, the initiative has received active response and support from more than 100 countries and international organisations, among

which over 40 have signed cooperation agreements with China. This year, China will host the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and the BRICS Xiamen Summit to discuss ways of taking forward win-win cooperation.

Africa, a continent of hope, is unleashing its growth potential. With a growth rate of 5% from 1995 and 2014, it is showing a strong momentum of collective rise. We are delighted to see that South Africa, as the most advanced economy with the greatest overall strength on this continent, has in recent years cemented progress in racial reconciliation, accelerated economic and social development and made significant strides in various national endeavors. South Africa has made outstanding achievements in hosting

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corporate headquarters and bases, advanced manufacturing, high-tech industries, infrastructure, finance, media, education and health at home. It has also played an increasingly important role in international and regional organisations, including the United Nations and the African Union. Under the theme of "Our future - make it work", South Africa has formulated the National Development Plan 2030 to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, improve economic strength, enhance overall national capacity and promote unity and cooperation of the whole society by 2030. We wish South Africa even greater success in these endeavours.

In the words of Nelson Mandela, "If there are dreams about a beautiful South Africa, there are also roads that lead to

their goal." With complementarities in development strategies, China and South Africa may well join hands for common development. This not only delivers benefits to the Chinese and South African peoples, but also helps to steer and catalyse China-Africa cooperation. China always views its relations with South Africa from a strategic and long-term perspective, and endeavors to fully implement the outcomes of the FOCAC Johannesburg Summit with a view to translating our traditional friendship into greater impetus for cooperation. Indeed, our converging strategic interests, massive potential and broad space for win-win cooperation have brought our two peoples together, endeavoring to achieve the dream that we share.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends,

Ancient Chinese philosophers believe that "The supreme good is like water". Embodying amazing accomplishments of mankind, civilisations are as unique as water, flowing endlessly and nourishing everything along their course. People-to-people exchange is the "driver" of friendship and "lubricant" for state-to-state relations. Next year, China and South Africa will celebrate the 20th anniversary of their diplomatic relations. At this new historical starting point, we need to leverage the propelling role of the PPEM, strengthen overall and top-level planning, and inject vitality into the comprehensive strategic partnership between our two countries. We also need to synergise the South African dream and the Chinese dream and forge a closer community of shared future. To this end, I wish to make the following proposals:

First, we need to work together to bring our comprehensive strategic partnership to a new height through people-to-people exchange. Strategic mutual trust, business cooperation, and people-to-people exchange are the three pillars of China-South Africa relations. We need to step up people-to-people exchange to make China and South Africa future-oriented strategic partners with a high degree of mutual trust, friendly partners with mutual understanding and mutual learning, equal development partners



for win-win progress, and global partners with mutual support and close collaboration. This will give powerful impetus to the advancement of China-South Africa comprehensive strategic partnership.

Second, we need to work together to open up a new horizon for people-to-people exchange between China and South Africa. A long-term plan needs to be formulated under the framework of the PPEM, with the following efforts to be made:

- advance higher education, basic education, vocational training and other education cooperation, deepen exchange in language teaching, expand youth exchange in innovation, entrepreneurship and cultural fields, and strengthen practical skills training for women and human resources development;
- promote cultural exchanges through hosting cultural year, art festival, film festival, expo and other activities in each other's countries;
- deepen mutual learning in sports and promote experience-sharing in developing sports that we are strong at;
- conduct high-level joint research, build demonstration science parks and develop cooperation in innovation;
- share good practices in healthcare reform, jointly tackle communicable diseases and other public health challenges, and deliver a healthier life to our peoples;

- encourage programme-exchange, co-production and other forms of cooperation between media outlets, and support archive cooperation for joint research on the history of our two countries and our relations, with a view to deepening understanding between our two peoples;
- deepen think-tank cooperation, conduct non-governmental dialogues and academic discussions, and further exchange views on the "African shared values" proposed by the African Union, the Ubuntu philosophy of South Africa, and China's Belt and Road Initiative and its vision of a community of shared future for mankind.

Third, we need to work together on flagship initiatives for China-South Africa to deliver more tangible benefits to the two peoples. People-to-people exchange is essentially of the people, and by the people, and therefore, should be for the people. We need to focus on the grassroots, reach out to communities, schools and businesses, and establish a new pattern of people-to-people exchange with extensive government as well as non-governmental participation. We need to support exchanges between the local governments in various fields, strengthen friendship and cooperation between non-governmental groups and social organisations, and encourage more citizens to travel to the other's country to experience the charm of diverse cultures, so that ordinary

people will be involved in and share in the joy of people-to-people exchange.

Fourth, we need to work together to make people-to-people exchange between China and South Africa a fine example for exchange between the Chinese and African civilisations and cultural cooperation among developing countries. Our world is defined by diverse human civilisations, just like delicious soup made of different ingredients. Such diversity, rather than a source of conflict, should be an engine driving the progress of human civilisation. China and Africa are both major cradles of human civilisation that have made historic contribution to the progress of human civilisation. As culturally diverse and multi-ethnic countries, China and South Africa should all the more cherish the diversity of human civilisation and cultures, draw on each other's strengths, seek commonalities while shelving differences, and set up an inspiring model for exchange between the Chinese and African civilisations and cultural cooperation among developing countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends,

An African proverb says that "When spiders unite, they can tie down a lion", while the Chinese believe that, "When brothers are of the same mind, they can break metal". Both vividly tell a simple truth: only through win-win cooperation can we make big achievements that deliver long-term benefits. I am confident that as long as we work together and move forward with strong commitment, China-South Africa people-to-people exchange will embrace a brighter future, and play a role bigger than anyone's imagination. Efforts made by the Chinese and South Africans today will pay off tomorrow. And the rainbow of China-South Africa friendship and cooperation will surely become more glamorous.

Thank you. ■

The above speech was made by Liu Yandong, Vice Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, at the First Meeting of China-South Africa High Level People-to-People Exchange Mechanism, in Pretoria, 24 April 2017.