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Organization of African Unity

**CLOSING STATEMENT BY
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,
AT THE FORUM ON CHINA-AFRICA COOPERATION**

**GREAT HALL OF THE PEOPLE
BEIJING, PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA**

12 OCTOBER 2000

**Mr. Chairman,
Premier Zhu Rongji,
President Abdelaziz Bouteflika,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

African Ministers and their counterparts from the People's Republic of China have been meeting for the past three days in this vibrant and historical city of Beijing and have deliberated on issues of profound importance for the mutual development of our peoples. The spirit of friendship, the genuine sense of commitment, and the resolve that have been demonstrated at this unprecedented and historic Forum, underline the bond of solidarity that exists between our two societies, a bond that has been nurtured over a long period and has overcome formidable challenges.

The success of this meeting is largely due to the fact that our relationship is founded upon the principles of mutual respect, mutual benefit and shared understanding of our peoples' needs. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Chinese and African sides have agreed in the Beijing Declaration and the Programme of Action to solemnly reaffirm the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence and other universally recognized principles governing relations among states. We welcome the decision of the Forum to further consolidate China-Africa Cooperation in order to establish within the framework of South-South Cooperation an enhanced and more dynamic partnership based on equality and mutual benefit. In this context, we note with satisfaction the agreement of the Ministers to undertake joint efforts to improve trade and investment opportunities between China and Africa.

We also welcome the decision of the Chinese Government to exert its considerable influence to advance the case and need for debt relief and/or cancellation for Africa. We particularly appreciate that despite the fact that China is a developing country and is itself a net-debtor, the Chinese Government, at this Forum, decided to reduce or cancel the debts of 10 billion RMB Yuan owed by the heavily indebted poor and least developed countries of Africa in the coming two years. This significant decision should, indeed, send out a strong message to other creditor countries to reconsider their attitude towards Africa's external debt problem.

Allow me, at this juncture, to convey Africa's appreciation and gratitude to President Jiang Zemin, to the Government and people of China for initiating the Forum and for providing the most congenial environment for its success. The consultative and collaborative manner in which this meeting was organized and the legendary hospitality of the Chinese people that we have all experienced during our stay in Beijing bear testimony to the seriousness attached by the Chinese authorities to this dialogue. The fact that we traveled all the way from Africa and came to Beijing in such impressive numbers for this collective discourse is a demonstration of our commitment to this important endeavour. It is also an expression of our appreciation of China's consistent support to Africa. Let it not be forgotten that our traditional friendship and historical bonds with China stand over several decades of unflinching support for Africa by China; a period during which China stood to be counted as Africa's reliable friend during her hour of need and a period which witnessed many of our countries firmly supporting China's legitimate rights.

We convened in Beijing in order to consult on how best to direct our relationship and strengthen our ties of cooperation within a context of new challenges emerging from a rapidly changing world. Indeed, the world has undergone profound and fundamental changes. Yes, it is a different world today compared to what it was when China and Africa forged their friendship in the early days. Now, the challenges are different with new pressures, including those of globalisation and liberalization. It is, therefore, imperative that China and Africa should redefine how the two sides would respond to new requirements, new challenges, new opportunities as well as new pressures which we in the South now particularly experience.

For us in Africa, the decisions that have been made at this Ministerial Forum assume a profound importance in the context of the vision of our countries. I am confident that the rekindled spirit of cooperation that emanates from this Forum will encourage African countries to redouble their efforts in building the African Union whose Constitutive Act has already been signed by close to two-thirds of our Member States; in striving to eliminate conflicts in our Continent; in consolidating institutions of governance that are all-inclusive; and also in our struggle to combat the devastation being caused in Africa by man-made, and natural disasters, HIV-AIDS, malaria and other killer diseases. In the same manner, the reinvigorated partnership will bolster our efforts in seeking a more active and equitable role in global interaction.

Undoubtedly, the history of our relations for the past fifty years provide us not only with inspiration and optimism, but also with important lessons about pitfalls and hurdles that we may have to overcome. We need to deploy this experience rigorously as we face the changing realities within our countries and in the global arena. The assertive role of new actors into the development scene of both our societies, the new ways of functioning that we have all embraced, the emergence of new technologies as well as the evolution of a different configuration of global political relations, all pose new challenges and call for innovative approaches in enhancing our relationship.

I am confident that within the framework of this revitalized cooperation, China and Africa will work together more vigorously in safeguarding the mutual interests of our two sides and in achieving our common objectives, such as acquiring a stronger voice in global negotiating fora. Similarly, within the framework of our cooperation we should as well strive to promote a more dynamic and engaging relationship in the areas of capacity building, information technology, infrastructure development and human welfare. We, in Africa, recognize the imperative necessity of realizing these objectives within the context of South-South cooperation. In this regard, China, being the largest and extremely dynamic third world country, is an important and valued partner of Africa.

The status and position of China as Africa's partner is not just being recognized now. The late President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere recognized and expounded that reality and on an occasion like this, it is most deserving to pay tribute to the foresighted and leadership role which he and other like-minded African Leaders of his time played in laying a solid foundation to make South-South Cooperation as well as China-Africa cooperation a reality.

The commitment and enthusiasm demonstrated at this Forum need to be sustained in ensuring that the mechanisms, which have been established, for follow-up and implementation perform their work effectively and realize the enunciated objectives. We should not allow the outcome of this historic Forum to remain another set of yet unfulfilled Declarations and Plans of Action. The more than 2 billion Chinese and African peoples have a lot to gain by the attainment of the forum's objectives.

Once again, I wish to thank the Government and People of the Peoples' Republic of China for creating the opportunity of this first-ever "Forum on China-Africa Cooperation- Ministerial Conference 2000". The OAU pledges its full support for the decisions taken and reaffirms its readiness to work with African States and China in ensuring the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-African Cooperation and the Programme for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and social Development.

Allow me to conclude with a personal note. I first came to China in 1963 when I was a very young man. Thereafter, I had a privilege of serving as Ambassador of my country in this great country in 1969. Since then, I have been coming to China on numerous occasions in different capacities. Every visit to China has been a visit of discovery and inspiration. Discovery, because every time one learns more about this great country with its ancient history and civilization. Inspiration, because of the tremendous changes and progress that has taken place over the years transforming China from a once oppressed, humiliated and under-developed country to the great and modernizing nation that it is today. And throughout, one thing has remained constant; the warmth and friendship of the people and Government of this country towards the people of Africa and their firm commitment to the cause and aspirations of the countries and people of the South.

I believe that this China-Africa Forum has served to enhance that friendship as it has helped to make both the Chinese and African sides to have a better comprehension of our respective aspirations.

Long live Africa-China Friendship, Solidarity and Cooperation.