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REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON ON CHINA - AFRICA
FORUM ON COOPERATION

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Introduction

1. Council will recall that the Forum on China – Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), at Summit level, took place on 4 – 5 November 2006, in Beijing, China. Heads of State and Government or their representatives from China and forty eight (48) African countries attended the Summit. It was preceded by a Ministerial Meeting attended by Foreign Ministers and Ministers of Economic Cooperation and/or Finance on 3rd November 2006 and Senior Officials on 1st – 2nd November 2006. The Kingdom of Morocco participated at the three (3) levels of meetings.
2. The African Union Commission (AUC) attended the Summit though not without difficulties, as China and some African countries wanted the AUC and the African Union excluded. Nevertheless, at the insistence of the Commission and some Member States, the Commission was present at the Official, Ministerial and Summit levels and I was able to speak at the Summit. Other organizations, such as the United Nations, European Union etc., only participated at the opening and closing ceremonies of the meetings.
3. Council may note that I was received in audience by the President of China, who used the occasion to stress the importance which China attaches to the African Union and reiterated his country's desire to work with the Union. He also announced the Chinese government's decision to build, at its cost, a Conference Centre Complex for the African Union in Addis Ababa.

Summit and its Outcomes

4. During the Summit, the two sides reviewed with satisfaction the expanding friendship and cooperation between the Peoples Republic of China and African countries in the past fifty (50) years since the inception of diplomatic relations. Pleased and encouraged by the good progress of their peoples in the past six (6) years since the formation of FOCAC and satisfied with the faithful delivery of the commitments in the Addis Ababa Action Plan (2004 – 2006) adopted at the 2nd Ministerial Conference, the two sides resolved to make joint efforts to advance the new type of strategic partnership between China and Africa.
5. Consequently and in order to build on the success of the Summit and Conference, as well as chart the course for China – Africa cooperation in all areas in the next three (3) years and promote friendship, peace, cooperation and development, the two sides formulated and adopted the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Plan of Action, 2007 - 2009. Regrettably, however, the Declaration and Plan of Action failed, at the instance of some AU Member States, to make any reference to the Constitutive Act of the Union.

Observations and Conclusions

6. I am glad to observe that the Beijing FOCAC Meetings and Summit were historic and constitute a major milestone in Africa-China Partnership and South-South Cooperation. The two major documents that were adopted (the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Action Plan) could, if faithfully and effectively implemented, lead to the realization of a virile partnership that is anchored on the principles of equality and mutual respect. The partnership could assist Africa in meeting some of its development challenges. I strongly believe it will assist the continent to diversify its external economic relations and reduce its excessive dependence on the developed Western economies.

7. The major disappointment about the FOCAC events in Beijing was the spectacle at the Ministerial and Senior Officials Meetings where AU Member States' delegates debated and disagreed among themselves about the relevance of the organization in the FOCAC process. The disagreement was appropriately described by a delegate as akin to Africa washing its dirty linens in the open. It is also inconsistent with our common goal of African unity and the need for the continent to speak with one voice in its engagement with the rest of the world, especially with powerful partners, such as China. While Morocco was a major divisive factor among African countries vis-à-vis the role of the Union in the FOCAC process, a contributory factor appears to be the inadequate understanding of the fact that a coordinating role for the AU would not preclude bilateral cooperation arrangements between China and African countries under the framework of FOCAC. It is to be noted that many African participants were unable to comprehend why reference to the Constitutive Act should be excluded from documents emanating from a meeting that brings many AU Members together.

8. A coordinating role for the African Union in the FOCAC process will indeed be in the interest of not only African countries but also of China. It will provide a greater opportunity for a more focused and better-organized engagement with China. It will prevent an unhealthy competition among African countries for the "carrots" in Africa-China partnership. Greater involvement of the AU in the FOCAC process will permit issues of regional integration to be accorded the priority they deserve in African-Chinese cooperation. I also believe that it will enable African countries to develop a collective response to the future challenges that may emerge in Africa-China partnership. On the side of China, anchoring its engagement in Africa on policies jointly adopted by African leaders within the framework of the AU and involving the AUC in the FOCAC process will shield China against some of the criticisms being made, especially by Africa's traditional partners, about its increasing engagement in Africa.

9. It is to be noted that I did make several attempts to engage with the Chinese authorities, on how the African Union Commission could be usefully involved in ensuring the success of the Forum but without any achievement.

However, by indicating at the meeting of officials that China had no difficulty with the participation of the African Union, the main obstacle appears to lie with the African side. I therefore strongly recommend the review of AUC's role in the FOCAC process which should follow the Banjul Decision on Africa's relations with these forums.

10. Egypt is expected to be the host country for the next (4th) Ministerial Conference of FOCAC scheduled for 2009. This, in effect, means that Egypt would take over from Ethiopia as the African Co-Chair of the FOCAC process. It is my hope that Egypt will work with us to ensure a proper place for our Union and its Commission to promote Africa's interest in this important Forum.

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