

The World, Africa, China and Ethiopia:
China -Africa Relations
A Lecture Given by H.E Dr. Tekeda Alemu, State
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- I. This is the topic that I wanted to explore with you today. Rather presumptions, but I thought some comments on these inter-related issues - at least raising a few questions on these issues - might be worthwhile when an African, and an Ethiopian official, gets an opportunity such as this one - an opportunity to speak to such an audience.

Some remarks on the general world situation today is appropriate, I thought when one addresses China-Africa relations - or for that matter addressing any internationally and regionally significant issues - because the world is indeed changing, and in a way, the international situation is in flux, including in terms of the world economic balance of forces. This indeed has had a major impact on the situation in Africa which is not only benign, but, by in large, positive. In all this, the role of China and other newly emerging countries, has been critical, perhaps more so in the case of China.

But the changes we see in the world ought not to be seen only in terms of changes under way concerning changes in economic balance of forces which normally create impulses pushing toward the adoption of a stance based on zero-sum calculations. There are also today matters that make the search for a win-win approach in relations among states an imperative necessity without which maintaining the viability of

our planet would be illusive. Climate change is one such issue which makes lack of effective co-operation among states very fatal for the international community as a whole. Here, developing effective partnership with Africa which has now chosen to speak with one voice is critical.

Africa is in the process of changing in other ways, as well. The 1980s was a lost decade for Africa. The 1990s were not much better, either. But over the last decade, Africa has indeed been moving forward. This might not apply to virtually all African countries, but it applies to sufficiently large number of African countries to be considered as a general trend in the continent. Africa, in general, appears to be on an encouraging trajectory.

What all this means is that Africa is becoming a real factor in the general evolution of the international political and economic situation. No doubt, this is largely a process which is in gestation, and a fledgling process which might take sometime before it matures properly. But already, Africa has begun to be a focus of attention and no doubt, in this regard, the relationship between China and Africa is coming under close scrutiny, but mostly, not in an objective manner, but rather in a manifestly biased way which totally excludes the African perspective. Here, the colonial perspective and the condescending attitude towards Africa is still vibrant.

I also wanted to touch upon Ethiopia not simply because of myself being an Ethiopian, but because Ethiopia demonstrates very vividly the positive developments under way in Africa. Moreover, the value of China-Africa relations is so vividly displayed in the enormously significant changes that are taking place in

Ethiopia. The partnership with China is making significant contribution to the welcome changes we see in Ethiopia, which, I might emphasize, does not exclude equally effective partnership with others.

- II.** Let me now look at these four inter-related themes - the general world situation, the current situation in Africa, the role of China and the situation in Ethiopia - more closely, but again in broad terms, and rather quickly and in a cursory manner.

But before I do so I would like to mention one or two points with respect to where I come from theoretically when I try to make sense of the interaction among nation-states and when I address the four themes that I have already outlined. And I think this is very critical because, more often than not, there is a lot of theoretical confusion and conceptual muddle on some of these issues, which is not always innocent, for it has a purpose - an ideological purpose with respect to which developing countries such as Ethiopia end up being at the receiving end of a bad deal.

The first point that needs to be emphasized is what should be regarded as the ABC of the study of International Studies and Foreign Affairs, and that relates to the fact that all nations are, first of all, driven, in their external behavior, by consideration of national interest. This applies to all nations. There are no exceptions in this. All states - big or small - are motivated by the pursuit of what is in their national interest. This applies as much to the United States, to China, to Germany as much as it applies to Ethiopia, or other African countries. The most that one can aspire to and hope for in

terms of inducing from others positive response in this regard is that they be inclined to establish partnership based on the promotion of mutual interest and mutual advantages.

Other wise, the principle that governs relations among nations in practice and in reality is the Westphalian principle, though again in practice there are attempts to ignore this when it comes to the interest of the developing countries. Hans Morgenthau will always be partly right here.

We should, in this respect, be rather skeptical when some appear to suggest that they are more concerned about the human right situation, or the state of governance, in Ethiopia than Ethiopians themselves. One should suspect that national interest consideration of various kinds - some obvious and some not so obvious - might be at work behind such claims of concern. As students, it would indeed be tragic if you missed this point.

But it is necessary to introduce a caveat here, and that relates to the fact that it is indeed short-sighted to imagine that states do not nonetheless have common interest and that it is only competition that defines relations among states. The world indeed has become a global village and that there are real fundamental issues which, unless handled in a co-operative way by all states, might herald the demise of our planet. Climate change is one such issue which can only be addressed - sooner than later - collectively and in a cooperative way on the basis of mutual but differentiated responsibility.

The fight against poverty and ensuring food security is another challenge which, though affecting in a direct way the

developing world, is an issue which is in the common interest of humanity to resolve. It is downright short-sighted to imagine that the world which can now be compared to a small boat can have one side of it which is intoxicated with affluence while the other part continues to wallow in misery. The mix is rather combustible which requires collective approach and real collaborative work. Accordingly, realism appears to suggest that assistance to the developing world should not strictly be viewed as falling within the realm of altruism, but something dictated by the imperatives of the need for ensuring the viability of the international community. There are other common interest that states have, including the need to keep extremism at bay and fighting terrorism and fanaticism.

Now let me come back to the four themes that I have outlined earlier.

As I have already indicated, we are at present going through a historic moment internationally. No doubt, the world that we have been familiar with since the Second World War is in the process of real transformation, though, while we might be able to decipher its general contour, we cannot in any definite sense say what it might look like eventually. But there is no denying the fact that it is more and more assuming the nature of multipolarity than anything else.

For Africa, this would mean that there is a need for it to broaden its contact with all parties that play significant roles in international political and economic relations. In fact, that is what appears to be taking place now when we look at the number of Forums of Co-operation that Africa has established

with a number of states playing significant role internationally. The Forum for China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) is one such Forum which is, in fact, perhaps the most effective and most dynamic of such forums.

As I have also already emphasized, Africa is in the process of real transformation. Africa is not a hopeless case. In fact, perhaps it is now time for the rest of the world to treat Africa as one of the poles, in this multipolar world, with the capacity, in its own ways, to contribute to the healthy and harmonious development of the world. At any event, that was the proposal that the Ethiopian Prime Minister made at the last summit of the African Union at the beginning of this year - a proposal which we are hopeful would be embraced by China and others. What this means is that a real beginning has to be made to treat Africa not simply as subject for humanitarian consideration but as real partner in the search for solutions to those challenges that the international community faces.

When we come to China, of course, it is undeniable that what China has made available to Africa, and to the developing world in general, are possibilities for consolidating sovereign choices and their independently chosen path of development. Here, while many things are said from various perspectives about the role of China in Africa, what is overlooked is the African perspective. That is tragic indeed. No doubt, it is impossible to say that the African view is uniform on the issue. But there is no doubt that the view of any proud African committed to telling the truth and making conclusion on the basis of objective facts will be that the emergence of China as a real factor in international economic cooperation, has been a

major asset for Africa. This is also the value of the Forum for China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC).

The value of the partnership with China for Africa can easily be gleaned from the very encouraging development in Ethiopia. No doubt, Ethiopia has also other partners and the country will continue to attach great importance to those partnerships. Those are traditional partnerships that Ethiopia will continue to develop and strengthen. Let me remind you about what I said earlier; not only is this a multipolar world but we should also focus on what unites the international community as a whole - on those challenges that require the collaborative efforts of all nations.

But nonetheless, truth be told, the role of China in Ethiopia has been so beneficial, it is in the interest of the country to do whatever is necessary to deepen that relationship further.

For Ethiopia, rapid economic development is a national security matter because we are convinced that is the only way of ensuring the viability of our nation. The same, more or less, applies to the rest of Africa. And that is why China is so critical for Africa. But this has to be reciprocal. Because, at the end of the day, relations that are not based on the pursuit of mutual advantages will not be realistic propositions. In other words, the interest of China should also be taken on board. The sign post for the future in Africa-China relations should continue to be the promotion of mutual interest. This is a principle that can also apply to all countries that seek the friendship of Africa. I have no doubt, the golden age of Africa-China relations is ahead of us. But this does not preclude, for both, developing

real partnerships with others. In fact, this is what the viability of our world demands.

I Thank You