

Opening Remarks at the SIIS Forum on Africa
International Symposium on “Promoting Global South Cooperation to
Support Peace and Development in Africa”

By

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Excellencies, distinguished Ambassadors of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Somalia to the People's Republic of China,

Eminent Representative of the Shanghai Municipal People's Government,

Representatives of African and Chinese Institutions,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is a pleasure to address this distinguished gathering. I have the honour to convey the compliments of His Excellency Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Chairperson of the African Union Commission to the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, to the Municipal Government of Shanghai, and to all the distinguished scholars, policymakers, diplomats, and partners and colleagues assembled here today for this important Symposium.

Allow me, at the outset, to commend the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies for its foresight in convening this Forum around a theme of such analytical and strategic weight: *Promoting Global South Cooperation to Support Peace and Development in Africa*. I am confident that our meeting here today will make, a meaningful contribution to the deepening of Sino-Africa relations, and to the broader project of South-South cooperation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet at a moment of both opportunity and consequence. This year marks the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Africa and China, and has also been designated the *Year of Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges*. Under the visionary leadership of His Excellency President Xi Jinping and His Excellency Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, China and Africa have continued to elevate their partnership. We commend President Xi's advancement of the Four Global Initiatives on Development, Security, Civilization and Governance. These initiatives align closely with Africa's own transformative agenda. We are confident that they would reinforce the multilateral order that developing nations need in order to thrive.

More fundamentally, the four initiatives intersect with the African Union's Agenda 2063, our collective blueprint for "The Africa We Want": *an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and acting as a dynamic force in the international arena*. From the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area to the pursuit of continental infrastructure connectivity, digital transformation, industrialisation and the silencing of the guns, Africa's aspirations are increasingly being translated into concrete programmes through which our continent seeks not merely growth, but structural transformation.

At the same time, the international system within which we operate is under considerable strain. The post-Second World War multilateral architecture, designed for a different distribution of global power, has struggled to adapt to a world in which the Global South now represents the majority of humanity, yet remains under-represented in the institutions that govern it. This anomaly needs to be corrected. As you are aware, conflict, climate disruption, debt distress and technological asymmetry continue to impose disproportionate costs on developing countries.

Yet these challenges also underscore a broader reality: the international system has not adapted at the same pace as the redistribution of economic dynamism and demographic weight toward the Global South. Africa today is not asking to be accommodated within global governance structures; it is asserting its legitimate place in shaping them. The continent's growing engagement in the G20 and other multilateral platforms reflects both an expanding contribution to global prosperity and a clear determination to participate more meaningfully in the decisions that affect its future.

Allow me, therefore, to offer three observations rooted in African Union policy, informed by the lived realities of our continent that peace, development and international cooperation must no longer be viewed as separate policy domains, but as mutually reinforcing pillars.

First, the relationship between peace and development in Africa is not sequential but constitutive.

Decades of scholarship and lived experience converge on this point: *peace is not merely the absence of conflict that precedes development, nor is development a reward that follows the establishment of peace.* The two are mutually constitutive. The African Union's doctrine of African Solutions to African Problems, operationalised through the African Peace and Security Architecture, reflects a hard-won recognition that durable peace must be locally owned, even as it benefits from international partnership. China-Africa cooperation on peace and security, whether through peacekeeping support, capacity-building or research partnerships such as those SIIS itself undertakes, should be evaluated against this single criterion: does it strengthen African institutional ownership, or does it inadvertently substitute for it?

Second, Africa's strategic autonomy and Global South solidarity are analytically and politically inseparable.

There is a lingering tendency in some quarters to view African assertions of strategic autonomy as being in tension with deeper international cooperation. I would argue the opposite. It is precisely an Africa, in partnership with the Global South, that is confident in its own agency, and coordinated in its diplomatic positions, that is best placed to secure meaningful reform of multilateral institutions, from the United Nations Security Council to International Financial institutions. Agenda 2063, the African Continental Free Trade Area, and Africa's growing coordination within the G20 and BRICS-plus formations are not separate initiatives but complementary expressions of a single strategic logic: that autonomy and solidarity, far from being in tension, are mutually reinforcing conditions for effective participation in global governance.

Third, the transformative development that Africa pursues must be underwritten by African research and African institutions.

The questions this Symposium poses, on critical minerals, green industrialisation, energy diversification and artificial intelligence, cannot be answered credibly without African expertise at the centre of the analysis. It is not sufficient for the terms of cooperation to be well-intentioned; they must be co-authored. This is why platforms such as SIIS's Center for African Studies, and the growing community of African research institutions represented here today, from Addis Ababa to Kampala to Lusaka, deserve sustained investment. Every partnership between African and Chinese research institutions that produces rigorous, independent scholarship on these questions is itself an act of strategic capacity-building.

Taken together, these considerations point to a larger conclusion. The future of Africa will not be determined by dependency, nor by isolation. It will be determined by the extent to which Africans exercise strategic agency through strong institutions, regional integration, knowledge production and principled international partnerships. The question before us is therefore not whether Global South cooperation remains relevant, but how it can be structured to accelerate implementation, strengthen sovereignty and contribute to a more representative and resilient system of global governance.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The African Union approaches this Symposium not as a passive beneficiary of analysis conducted on its behalf, but as an active partner in a shared intellectual and policy enterprise. Africa today is a continent of demonstrated agency: in mediating its own conflicts, in negotiating the terms of its own trade architecture, and increasingly, in shaping the discourse on global governance reform. The task before this Forum is to ensure that our scholarship keeps pace with that agency, and that the cooperation we design reflects the equal partnership that both our regions have long professed and must now more fully practise.

I anticipate with confidence the rich exchanges that will emerge from this Forum. May our deliberations serve as a further testament to the fact that Sino-Africa cooperation. I have no doubt that the broader partnership among nations of the Global South, derives its strength not solely from historical affinity, but from a common commitment to shaping a future defined by peace, prosperity and shared progress.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Xie Xie!