

Speech by H.E Ambassador Rahamtalla Mohamed Osman, African Union Ambassador to China.

Distinguished guests, Dr Ibrahim Mayaki, and colleagues and friends,

It gives me great pleasure to join you virtually this afternoon on the outcomes of the 8th Forum of China-Africa Cooperation. As the African Union Ambassador to China, may I first extend my thanks to you all for joining this timely event. I am looking forward to a very fruitful dialogue this afternoon.

I would also like to take a moment to thank our colleagues at Development Reimagined– who have been working tirelessly in the run-up to FOCAC in supporting African and Chinese officials and stakeholders in coordinating our engagement. I would also like to thank the Centre of China and Globalisation for supporting this webinar, which is greatly appreciated.

The 8th FOCAC is markedly different to our previous forums - we are facing a critical time in Africa's economic and social development. As COVID-19 has spread across the world, it has exposed a range of strengths of the African continent, including our proactive response to health threats. However, COVID19 has also shone a light on what more needs to be done to ensure the development of our economies to best protect and support our citizens.

In this sense, COVID-19 also offers a chance to 'reset' – to strengthen our economies and development as we recover. The fact is, COVID-19 has only made my work here in China more urgent and necessary - which is to help coordinate and share the African Union Member State's collective views on poverty reduction and sustainable development with Chinese stakeholders and engage Chinese stakeholders actively in our priorities and development plans.

FOCAC8 has indeed been a unique opportunity for African countries to articulate our cooperation needs towards China. Our Ambassadors, including with support from Development Reimagined, have gathered and formulated new announcements, commitments and initiatives, whilst we are at this COVID-19 moment. These 'demands' have been effectively translated into new and important developments in our cooperation with China.

Indeed, it is important for all – governments, businesses and citizens - to digest and understand these developments which have been released over the past two days – as a comprehensive understanding can inform us to shape the outcomes we want post-FOCAC – to best meet our needs and ensure implementation of what has been agreed. This is why panels and open discussions, such as this one, are so important.

And this time our task is more challenging – we are not just digesting speeches, the declaration and the action plan, but also two new key documents – the Vision 2035 and the Climate Change Declaration. These are welcome, brand-new visions that provide a clear basis – a benchmark – taking both Africa and China's long-term sustainable development plans into account.

So let me emphasise 8 key points from this 8th FOCAC, taking a holistic view, and setting a further context for our discussion here today.

First, there have been several key developments in our negotiations compared to previous FOCAC meetings. We have successfully negotiated significant commitments, including 1 billion COVID19 vaccines, "green lanes" for our agricultural exports, \$10 billion in credit lines and \$10 billion SDR allocation from China to Africa, and more. Such commitments cannot be underestimated, both in

terms of their impacts on African development, as well as the benefits they provide to Chinese stakeholders in shaping their business and consumer opportunities with our continent.

Second, for me in my role as the African Union Ambassador to China, one of the most critical developments is the inclusion of the African Union's 6 Continental Frameworks as well as working with the AU's Development Agency NEPAD, led by Dr Mayaki, in the China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035 document. This is instrumental for supporting our African-led development agenda and coordinates with our goals and outcomes aligned to our continental, regional and national development plans.

Third, new financial commitments have been made from China in spite of narratives suggesting China's support for Africa's development is waning. For example, the action plan makes clear China's explicit continued commitment to concessional loans for Africa's regional infrastructure development. I am particularly excited about the willingness to support 10 regional connectivity projects announced by President Xi. As our great West African Sister, Nobel Prize Winner and former President of Liberia Madame Ellen Johnson Sirleaf once said, *"if your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough."* Our infrastructure and development dreams are big – they must be – our land is three times the size of China. We need infrastructure that will service 2.5 billion people by 2050 – right now we lack basic electricity to service 600 million people.

Fourth, the plans see our partnerships with China move into new sectors or areas. The emphasis on Digital cooperation in the action plan is key, and rightly so. The internet is a force for good, an enabler of trade, creator of jobs; and in the wake of covid19, with lockdowns and travel restrictions, It has become an essential need for our lives and prosperity, including for school children. So we are keen to see how we can take this forward.

Fifth, the FDI targets in President Xi's speech and the Vision 2035 document are crucial. Africa's Agenda 2063 envisions the continent being the third-largest economy globally and taking over from China to be the world's future manufacturing hub, with a greener, more environmentally-friendly hue. China's pledge for an additional \$60 billion of foreign direct investment by 2035 – added to the existing over 40 billion will be key to this. We must work together to ensure this transition continues through local manufacturing, continued Chinese investment into value-addition so that Chinese entrepreneurs and seasoned business leaders may flourish on our continent while creating decent jobs for our local people, and boosting both productivity and value of African exports.

Sixth, the vaccine and trade commitments – such as the "green lanes" for our agricultural exports - are highly significant. From an African perspective, we do not want China to simply be our largest bilateral trade partner. We want China to be our largest destination for *our* exports, the targets in Xi's speech and the vision documents are a significant step towards making this happen.

Seventh, there are definitely some areas of our partnership that remain unclear. Tourism for instance, and the return of African students to China. Given the continued COVID19 context and emergence of new variants, it is too uncertain to make commitments in these areas. Nevertheless, I am confident that, and especially with the boost in vaccines that the new commitments indicate to our continent, we will continue to keep this open, and in the meantime, the more limited but new opportunities for African professionals and students to work in China included in the outcomes are highly welcome, and again were a key ask from our side in order to ensure an equal partnership.

Eighth, and finally, the biggest issue now is HOW. Our citizens are always calling for more understanding of the relationship, our businesses too. The fact is, the commitments made at FOCAC will not be led by those of us in the FOCAC rooms in Dakar, Beijing or online! They will be led by our citizens and businesses. I am hopeful that in this discussion and in the coming weeks as we all digest the findings, we can also gather ideas for how to strengthen the delivery, implementation and monitoring of the commitments made over the last two days, especially from the African side.

As I finish, I would like to leave you with one last quote, by our great Senegalese leader, poet and artist the first President of the Republic, the Late Leopold Senghor, who once said *"We do not inherit the land from our parents, we borrow it from our children"*.

The success of FOCAC8 in Senegal despite the challenges of COVID-19 is testament to our strong commitment to continue advancing our existing relations. But the fact is our youth must benefit. We must ensure that cooperation is of the highest quality, so that it is in fact, not just borrowing from our children, it becomes a gift to our children. I believe we are on the road to achieving this, but we must work hard and push ourselves on all sides to keep doing better.

Thank you.