

China: A Development Partner to the Pacific Region

Dear Friend,

Tena Koe!

I would like to share with you the relations between China and the Pacific Region.

In my decades of diplomatic career, only a handful of events or activities have left me with deep impressions and everlasting memories. One of them is the collective meeting between President Xi Jinping and the Leaders of Pacific Island Countries that have diplomatic ties with China, held on the margin of the APEC Leaders' Informal Meeting in Port Moresby in November 2018. I was a witness to the event. President Xi and the Pacific leaders at the time jointly agreed to elevate the relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership featuring mutual respect and common development, ushering in a new era of all-around cooperation between the two sides. In October last year, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and relevant Pacific Island Countries foreign ministers established a regular meeting mechanism, scaling new heights in the relations.

Over the years, China has deepened economic and trade relations with countries worldwide, including New Zealand and Pacific Island Countries. China has now become the largest trading partner to more than 120 countries. The cooperation benefits the peoples involved and boosts the economic growth of the relevant countries, regions, and the world. China is endowed with capital, technology, market, and especially outstanding infrastructure capabilities. While increasing import from Pacific Island Countries, China helps them build infrastructure such as roads, ports, and airports, within the framework of South-South cooperation, to improve people's livelihood and strengthen their capabilities for sustainable development.

Many people in the Pacific region are yet to be alleviated from the long-term poverty, and some countries are still listed as the least developed. Developing the economy and improving people's lives are the top priorities for these countries. Although some are relatively well-off, their development is still insufficient and unbalanced due to the "tyranny of distance", small economic scale, over-reliance on limited primary

industries and products. For most of them, while climate change is becoming an existential challenge, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit their economies hard and battered people's livelihoods. As a fellow developing country, China feels deeply and dearly the Pacific Island Countries' aspirations towards development and has responded positively to their wishes for economic and trade cooperation.

China and the Pacific Island Countries respect and support each other. Upon the outbreak of the pandemic two years ago, leaders of many Pacific Island Countries sent messages and calls of condolences to their Chinese counterparts. In the past two years, China has delivered PPEs, vaccines, and medicines to the Pacific region and provided funding in support of its COVID-19 Response to the best of its capacity.

When China makes a commitment, it delivers. Last year, China-Pacific Island Countries Emergency Supplies Reserve was set up right after it was announced at the first China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meeting. Thanks to that, China has managed to provide the Solomon Islands with COVID vaccines and essential supplies to help curb the pandemic since the beginning of this year. In addition, China came to Tonga's rescue with bottled water, canned meat, medical packages, generators, water pumps, tents, and other materials in urgent need right after its volcanic eruption. More recently, anti-COVID supplies from China have arrived in Kiribati.

China is fully aware that climate change is the single biggest security challenge that the Pacific region is faced with and has thus promoted cooperation with the region. As the largest developing country actively engaged in global climate change cooperation, China has announced its firm commitment to carbon peaking and neutrality and has declared that it will no longer build any new coal-fired projects abroad, which has been well received in the Pacific Islands. The establishment of the China-Pacific Island Countries Climate Change Cooperation Center last year has added to the tool-box to address this common challenge.

Admittedly, China and the Pacific Island Countries are distant from one another geographically and different in political systems and lifestyles. However, we have a lot in common. We are all pursuing national development and the better lives for our peoples. We share the aspiration for world peace and regional stability. And we hold each other in respect. Linked by traditional sea routes, the peoples of China and the Pacific Island Countries have maintained continuous exchanges across the vast Pacific over hundreds of years. With cultures alike and hearts connected, we are engaged in practical and mutually beneficial cooperation.

While developing the relations with the Pacific Island Countries, China never interferes in their internal affairs, nor imposes its own will on them. On the contrary, we believe that all countries are equal regardless of size and always adopt an approach of respect and sincerity in dealing with our counterparts.

China never pursues the so-called 'Debt Trap' diplomacy, does not believe in zero-sum games, and never makes empty promises. In fact, we always match our commitments with real and concrete actions. We promote common development to help the Pacific Island Countries avoid the 'Underdevelopment Trap.' Not a single country has suffered debt distress because it borrows from China. China's grants, and the concessional loans and debt restructuring packages offered by China on terms comparable to developed countries and international financial institutions, have helped the recipients enhance their long-term development capabilities and overcome various challenges, including their capacity to address the debt burdens.

China has never engaged in geopolitical expansion and competition games, has no appetite for claiming 'backyards' and 'spheres of influence,' and has never targeted any third party when developing relations with other countries, including the Pacific Island Countries. On the contrary, China cherishes open regionalism featuring dialogues and communications. China remains open towards trilateral and multi-party cooperation, and ready to work with all countries and organizations willing and able to contribute to the region's peace, stability, and development. In the same vein, China's relations and cooperation with relevant countries should not be hamstrung by any third party.

Sovereignty and territorial integrity is among China's core interest. As a widely accepted norm of international relations, the One-China principle is the political foundation and precondition for China to develop relations with other countries. China is pleased that this principle has been firmly supported by the international community, including the majority of the Pacific Island Countries. No attempt to challenge or undermine this principle can succeed, any attempt to create 'two Chinas' and 'one China, one Taiwan' or any support for 'Taiwan independence' is doomed to fail, and any attempt to utilize Taiwan issue to divide and destabilize this region will inevitably be opposed by most Pacific Island Countries.

China respects New Zealand's historical ties and links with the Pacific and its traditional role and influence in the region. In this connection, China is willing to strengthen communications and consultations with New Zealand on regional affairs and ready for further tripartite cooperation building on past experiences. There is ample space for collaboration in this regard, and it is also in line with the needs and aspirations of our island partners. China and New Zealand are critical bilateral partners to each other. The two parties should also promote regional development hand in hand and take regional cooperation as an integral part of our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

The Pacific Island Countries are presently grappling with the various challenges posed by economic difficulties, the pandemic, and climate change. China is ready to work with the Pacific partners to implement the consensus reached by our leaders,

continue to expand our practical cooperation, and share the benefits of economic globalization to address the common challenges. China is also willing to work with other countries, seeking common ground while shelving differences, to promote the stability and prosperity of the Pacific region.

Thank you for your attention. Your ideas and suggestions regarding this subject are always welcome.

Wang Xiaolong
Chinese Ambassador to New Zealand