basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Address by Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga at the 25th Anniversary Celebration of China-South Africa Diplomatic Relations held at Time Square Arena, Pretoria.

21 October 2023

Programme Director

His Excellency Mr. Chen Xiaodong

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

People's Republic of China to South Africa

Mr Zhou Yujiang (Chinese Embassy)

Mr Liu Xin (Shenzhen Government Official)

Mr Wan Sang Chan (Chairman)

Mr Cedric Frolick (South Africa National Assembly House Chairperson)

Mr Li Xinzhu (Director of South African Chinese Police Co-operation Centre)

Mr Chen Zhen Wen (Managing Director of Yin Guang Sha listed stock Company in Shenzhen)

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

Good evening,

Twenty-seven years ago, in a momentous act that symbolically cast off the shackles of the apartheid past, a revered statesman signed the South African Constitution into law.

President Nelson Mandela, a global icon of peace and Nobel laureate widely regarded as the greatest liberator of the 20th century, spoke of the need for South Africa to "redeem herself" from the legacy of apartheid.

He envisioned a new society founded on the democratic values of equality, non-racialism, and non-sexism, with the Constitution serving as a beacon guiding the nation towards this noble aspiration.

Today, as we commemorate the 25th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between South Africa and China, we celebrate the convergence of two nations united in their commitment to building a more just and equitable world.

In 1996, our Constitution ushered South Africa into the fold of civilised nations, erasing the stigma that isolated us from the international community.

It became the cornerstone of our foreign policy, guiding our interactions with other nations based on mutual respect, cooperation, and shared values.

Therefore, it is with immense honour and privilege that I stand before you on this momentous occasion, marking a quarter-century of partnership, friendship, and collaboration between our two great nations.

Our ties with China are rooted in a deep understanding of international cooperation's importance in addressing global challenges.

We have worked together to promote peace and security, advance sustainable development, and foster economic growth.

As we look ahead, I am confident our relationship will continue to flourish based on the solid foundation of mutual respect, trust, and shared interests.

May the next 25 years of China-South African relations be even more fruitful, bringing lasting benefits to our two peoples and contributing to a more peaceful, prosperous, and just world.

Ladies and gentlemen, this anniversary carries immense significance in our diplomatic history, and it is a privilege to participate in this joyous celebration.

Our partnership with China has blossomed over the years, and today, we reflect upon the remarkable journey we have undertaken together.

Establishing diplomatic relations between our nations was a pivotal moment that laid the foundation for a robust and enduring bond.

It has been a relationship characterised by mutual respect, shared values, and an unwavering commitment to common goals.

One of the most notable facets of our partnership has been our collaboration in the field of basic education.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation in the Field of Basic Education, inked in 2013, is a testament to our dedication to providing quality education to our children.

This partnership has enabled us to exchange knowledge, resources, and experiences, ultimately benefiting both our nations.

A significant achievement within our educational collaboration has been the introduction of Mandarin as an elective foreign language in South African school curricula.

This initiative, which commenced in 2016, has facilitated language learning, fostered cultural understanding and strengthened people-to-people relations between our countries.

Furthermore, we have witnessed a continuous exchange of visits, study tours, and educational programmes that have enriched our education systems.

These interactions have empowered us to learn from each other's best practices, further enhancing the quality of education in our respective countries.

China has been a great friend of the Basic Education in South Africa.

Tonight, I mention but a few initiatives supported generously by the Chinese people.

Firstly, I am delighted to highlight the invaluable support we have received from the Chinese Government in recognising and nurturing educational excellence during the National Teaching Awards (NTA).

In 2022, the China Communications Construction Company demonstrated their commitment to education by supporting the NTA's Excellence in Special Needs Leadership category with a generous cash prize of R50,000. This gesture underscores the importance of inclusive education within our partnership.

As we move into 2023, I am thrilled to announce that 25 teachers have been honoured with fully paid study tours to China through the NTA. These experiences are bound to enrich their teaching practices and contribute significantly to our ongoing educational advancements.

In another inspiring display of solidarity, the Chinese Government promptly responded to the call for assistance when KwaZulu-Natal faced devastating floods in April 2022.

The Chinese Embassy in Pretoria stepped up, providing a donation of R200,000. This contribution was received on 6 May 2022 and played a crucial role in alleviating the challenges faced by our schools during that challenging period.

Additionally, the Chinese Bridge Competition for Primary and Secondary School Learners continues to be a testament to South Africa and China's cultural exchange and educational cooperation.

Since 2015, South Africa has proudly hosted its own Chinese Bridge Competition annually, a tradition that the Department of Basic Education actively supports.

These initiatives exemplify our two nations' enduring partnership and shared commitment to advancing education and cultural exchange.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your attention to these remarkable accomplishments in our collaboration with China.

Programme director, I am pleased to announce that we have embarked on a journey to establish three Mega Focus Schools in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Limpopo provinces.

This project can potentially revolutionise basic education in our country and strengthen our partnership with China.

These schools will be dedicated to providing specialised basic education focusing on nurturing talent.

These Mega Focus Schools are envisioned as centres of excellence, leading curriculum development and best practices.

They will have access to the highest quality human resources, materials, and equipment, all optimally utilised to benefit our learners and enhance our basic education system.

In a promising development, a Note Verbale from the Department of International Relations and Co-operation (DIRCO) indicated that the Chinese Government is eager to kickstart a feasibility study for this project.

Furthermore, China has affirmed its commitment to completing this initiative through grant funding.

This collaborative effort exemplifies the strength of our diplomatic relations and the potential to transform basic education in South Africa.

As we celebrate this remarkable milestone, we are reminded of the importance of partnerships in addressing global challenges.

Our collaboration extends beyond basic education; it encompasses areas such as trade, culture, and humanitarian efforts.

For instance, the state of trade between South Africa and China is robust and mutually beneficial.

In 2022, bilateral trade reached a record high of US $ 614 billion, making China South Africa's largest trading partner.

China is a major importer of South African raw materials, such as iron ore, coal, manganese, and manufactured goods, such as automobiles and machinery.

South Africa, in turn, imports a wide range of consumer goods, electronics, and infrastructure equipment from China.

Together, we have positively impacted our countries and on the international stage.

Ladies and gentlemen, the recent developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have drawn the attention of the international community, including China.

The response from the Chinese Government has been resolute and consistent, emphasising the importance of protecting civilians and condemning any actions that cause harm.

China has repeatedly called for calm, restraint, and an immediate end to hostilities to prevent further deterioration of the situation.

Like South Africa, China has underlined its support for the two-state solution and establishing an independent State of Palestine as the key to achieving lasting peace and security in the region.

As we move forward, let us continue working with our international partners to promote peace, stability, and justice in the region.

In conclusion, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Chinese Government, our partners, and all those who have contributed to the enduring success of our diplomatic relations.

Let us continue to build on the foundation we have laid, fostering deeper ties and achieving even greater heights in our partnership.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to the festivities ahead as we commemorate this significant milestone in our diplomatic history.