

Speech by Justus Thuthi Wanjiru During the first China-Africa human rights seminar on the afternoon of August 22nd in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Advancing the Right to Development through the Africa-China Dar es Salaam Consensus and the Belt and Road Initiative

Distinguished Leaders, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Afternoon!

It is with profound honor and humility that I address you today on the shared journey of Africa, China, and the wider Global South toward prosperity, dignity, and justice.

We meet at a historic moment. On March 8, 2024, in Dar es Salaam, scholars and experts from more than 50 countries issued the **Dar es Salaam Consensus**. This document was not merely an outcome of dialogue, but a collective voice of the Global South. It reaffirmed that *“all nations, large or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, have the sovereign right to independently choose their path of development, in accordance with their history, culture, and priorities.”*

For too long, development models have been externally imposed, often with conditionalities that erode sovereignty. The Dar es Salaam Consensus charted a new course — one based on equality, non-interference, mutual respect, and shared prosperity.

Excellencies,

This vision finds natural synergy with the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. Since its launch in 2013, the BRI has grown into what President Xi Jinping has described as *“a road of peace, prosperity, openness, green development, and innovation, a road that connects civilizations and brings benefits to all.”*

The BRI has mobilized close to one trillion dollars in investment and more than 3,000 cooperation projects worldwide. But beyond numbers, it has built new bridges of cooperation — physical, digital, and human. It is a platform where Africa and China stand shoulder to shoulder, pursuing development on the basis of partnership rather than prescription.

Together, the Dar es Salaam Consensus and the BRI redefine development cooperation in the 21st century. They elevate the **right to development** — long marginalized in international

discourse — to the central pillar of global governance. They affirm that modernization can take diverse forms and that dignity and sovereignty must never be compromised.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to highlight three dimensions of this vision.

First, the dimension of sovereignty and equality.

The Consensus reaffirmed that *“development is the inalienable right of every nation and every people, and must be pursued free from coercion or external imposition.”* This principle resonates deeply in Africa, where development has too often been tied to external conditions. The BRI, by contrast, provides infrastructure, investment, and connectivity while respecting sovereignty and supporting locally defined priorities, such as the African Union’s **Agenda 2063**.

Second, the dimension of inclusive globalization

President Xi has emphasized that *“the Belt and Road belongs to all its partners, and its fruits should be shared by all.”* This is a fundamental departure from past models of globalization that enriched the few while excluding the many. In Africa, we already see its impact: new railways linking regions, modern ports expanding trade, digital corridors connecting communities, and energy projects lighting homes and industries. These are not isolated projects; they are the foundations of a more inclusive, balanced globalization.

Third, the dimension of knowledge and solidarity.

The Dar es Salaam Consensus called for *“deepened cooperation in science, technology, education, and research, so that the wisdom of the Global South contributes directly to global progress.”* Responding to a collective letter from African scholars, President Xi encouraged us to *“expand research and exploration of development models tailored to Global South realities”* and to build a high-level community with a shared future. This underscores that our cooperation is not only about roads and bridges, but also about ideas, innovation, and the empowerment of human talent.

Excellencies,

Our world faces daunting challenges: poverty and inequality, climate change, pandemics, conflicts, and financial instability. No nation, no matter how powerful, can address these alone. The Consensus and the BRI provide us with tools to act together. They commit us to:

- Reform global financial systems to give greater voice to developing nations.
- Advance clean energy and sustainable development consistent with the Paris Agreement and the UN 2030 Agenda.
- Safeguard peace and security by addressing disputes through consultation, not confrontation.
- Deepen people-to-people exchanges, so that cooperation is not only among governments but also among scholars, youth, and communities.

These commitments are already yielding results, from new financial mechanisms like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, to green development principles guiding BRI projects, to the Health Silk Road enhancing public health systems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to conclude with a vision.

The Belt and Road we are building must not only connect ports and railways — it must connect peoples, cultures, and futures. The Consensus we have affirmed must not only defend sovereignty — it must uphold dignity and justice. And the right to development we champion must not only guarantee growth — it must guarantee opportunity for every nation and every citizen.

As the Dar es Salaam Consensus declares, *“Development is not the privilege of a few, but the right of all humanity.”*

Let us, therefore, walk this road together — Africa, China, and the Global South — as equal partners, as co-architects of a fairer and more inclusive world order.

This is our responsibility. This is our opportunity. And this is our moment.

Thank you!