

Turkey: Africa's Friend, Compatriot And Partner



ANKARA, Turkey, June 10, 2016 (Media Release) -- Over the next days, Turkey's political and business leaders will embark on a historic visit to Uganda, Kenya and Somalia. We will seek to promote closer cooperation with our regional allies, develop solutions to shared challenges and explore mutually beneficial opportunities.

Many people in the world associate the African continent with extreme poverty, violent conflict and a general state of hopelessness. The people of Turkey have a different view. We believe that Africa deserves better.

Africa has three core advantages

First, the continent has a young and vibrant population at a time when Europe and other parts of the world are rapidly ageing. If the world cooperates with local and national governments in the region, we can create avenues for young people to make a positive impact on their communities. African women, likewise, have the potential to become more active players in economic and social life.

Moreover, Africa is a continent blessed with vast natural resources. Uganda and Kenya, among others, have not only large oil reserves but also plenty of fertile land and regular rainfall.

To be clear, the rest of Africa is no different, even though years of colonial rule and exploitation stripped local communities of what rightfully belongs to them. If the world stops acting out of greed and focuses on helping the African people to help themselves, the continent could become an economic powerhouse.

Finally, the people of Africa have an entrepreneurial spirit that could potentially turn the continent around. Despite decades of exploitation and various challenges, the continent has always found a way to survive through innovation. As Africa assumes a more prominent role in the international arena, this spirit of entrepreneurialism will help to build a safer future for the next generation.

Turkey's efforts

Since 2002, the government of Turkey has been working hard to help African nations to discover their potential and take steps in the right direction.

In an effort to reinvigorate our long-neglected ties with the continent, Turkey in 2005 launched an African initiative to cooperate more closely with our friends and allies in the region.

Over the next years, we proceeded to hold two Turkey-Africa partnership summits in Istanbul, Turkey and Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. The events were not only our way of thanking the people of Africa for their warm welcome but also reiterating our commitment to a long-term partnership. Indeed, the summits marked a turning point in Turkey's relations with Africa.

At the same time, Turkish officials and non-governmental organisations have been working with local communities to address pressing problems. Over the years, Turkey's development-centred humanitarian aid model helped millions of people, including thousands in drought-struck Somalia, to get back on their feet.

Since 2011, Somalia has been one of the top three recipients of Turkey's development aid. Our efforts continued with the completion of the Turkish-Somalian Education and Research Hospital, East Africa's largest medical facility, last year.

As a sign of Turkey's continued commitment to the future of Somalia, I will inaugurate the new Turkish embassy in Mogadishu, which is Turkey's largest diplomatic mission, during my forthcoming visit.

The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, or TIKA, remains active across the continent and implements hundreds of humanitarian and development projects to provide better healthcare, promote agriculture, protect the environment and facilitate commerce.

Meanwhile, more than 4,500 African students continue their education in Turkey's prestigious universities on government and NGO scholarships. What sets the Turkish development and humanitarian aid model is our focus on mutual respect.

Deeper partnership

In recent years, Turkey's bilateral relations with African nations have also been improving. A record number of official visits by Turkish and African leaders helped us to build stronger ties with the continent, promote partnerships of equals and serve the interests of both parties.

Since assuming the Turkish presidency in August 2014, I had the pleasure of visiting nine African countries and hosting a large number of African leaders on the occasion of bilateral visits and international summits.

Our cooperation with Africa has not been limited to official visits. Over the past decade, Turkey signed a number of treaties and launched joint projects across the continent to challenge the traditional hierarchy between the exploiter and the exploited.

As a sign of our faith in Africa, Turkish Airlines took a bold decision to enter the African market and quickly expanded its network to 48 destinations in 32 countries.

Since 2000, Turkey's trade with Sub-Saharan Africa grew eightfold to reach \$6bn as the number of Turkish embassies across the continent reached 34 - a fivefold increase.

Turkey's cooperation with Africa isn't limited to diplomacy and trade either. In the international arena, we are committed to furthering the interests of African nations.

[Having hosted](#) the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in 2011, Istanbul set the stage for the first ever [World Humanitarian Summit](#) last week.

As representatives from 173 countries, including 32 Sub-Saharan nations, joined forces to reform the international humanitarian system along with NGOs, volunteers and survivors of humanitarian crises, the summit gave hope to millions of people in Africa and elsewhere.

Compatriot of Africa

Turkey looks forward to working more closely with our African friends and allies in a range of areas.

Many African nations, including Uganda, Kenya and Somalia, remain on the frontlines in the war against human suffering as Western nations devote their resources to building taller walls, ramping up security and tightening travel restrictions.

Having spent more than \$10bn to provide humanitarian relief to three million Syrians within our borders, the Turkish government will continue raising awareness about the efforts of African nations.

The people of Turkey and Africa are also united in their experiences with terrorism. As a country facing crucial challenges including terrorism, regional instability and the refugee crisis, we can relate to the predicament in which our partners such as Uganda and Kenya find themselves. Moving forward, we pledge to work with our African allies and friends more closely on counterterrorism, among other issues.

Finally, Turkey will take necessary steps to promote entrepreneurialism, which has had a positive influence on the Turkish economy over the past decade.

The African Handicraft Market and Culture House, which was launched in the Turkish capital of Ankara with the support of Turkey's First Lady Emine Erdogan, represents a concrete step to generate income for Africa's female entrepreneurs. Moving forward, we hope to share our entrepreneurial experiences with the people of Africa.

The growing cooperation between Turkey and Africa shows that a lot can be accomplished by engaging our partners genuinely and finding solutions that serve the interests of both sides. It also sends a strong message about Africa's true potential to the world.

One of my favourite African proverbs goes: True poverty is the lack of friends. Today and for ever, Turkey will be a friend, a compatriot and a partner of Africa.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan is the President of Turkey.