

《Morocco eyes mutual benefit under Belt and Road Initiative》

RABAT, May 8 (Xinhua) -- For many centuries, Morocco had played a major role in the old Maritime Silk Road, connecting the major civilizations of Asia, Europe and Africa.

With the Belt and Road Initiative, Morocco is set to regain its role and contribute to the embodiment of China's promising proposal to build a Silk Road Economic Belt and a 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in cooperation with related countries.

The North African kingdom offers a number of assets to contribute to this ambitious initiative. Morocco enjoys a long-standing history of exchange and cooperation with the countries along the old Silk Road, and China, which will host the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation on May 14 and 15, is on the top of them.

Morocco and China share a long history of exchanges and a long tradition of friendship. Back in the middle of the seventh century, one Chinese, named Du Huan, already travelled to Morocco. Later on, in the 13th century, Wang Dayuan of the Yuan dynasty also went as far as Morocco.

In the 14th century, Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta travelled to China and had stayed nearly three decades in the country. In the end of his travels to various countries, he wrote a book where he dedicated a whole chapter to his journey to China, narrating with great amazement the grandeur of Chinese civilization.

Despite the far geographic distance between the two countries, their exchange has never stopped. The North African kingdom was the second country (Egypt was the first one) in the continent to recognize the People's Republic of China in 1958, and bilateral cooperation progressed slowly but steadily.

In recent years, Morocco and China intensified their economic cooperation. China has become Morocco's fourth trade partner with over 3.4 billion U.S. dollars in 2015. Chinese investment in Morocco increased by 195 percent and 93 percent in 2014 and 2015.

During Morocco's King Mohammed VI's visit to Beijing in May 2016, the two countries decided to establish China-Morocco strategic partnership, opening new chapter in the bilateral relations.

Since this historical visit, a significant increase in the exchange has taken place. Many joint ventures have been launched, including a mega project of building industrial park in the Northern city of Tangiers with 10 billion dollars investments.

In addition to the bilateral cooperation, Morocco and China reach consensus on many issues, particularly non-intervention and building mutually-beneficial South-South cooperation. In this connection, Morocco sees promising cooperation within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, especially in Africa.

"Morocco has strategic depth in West Africa, built on historical, cultural and religious relations. It can play a key role in linking (West African) countries to the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and open new opportunities in the fast-

growing economies of West Africa," Morocco's former ambassador to China, Jaafar Hakim Laalej, said in a previous interview.

The kingdom is already the top investor in West Africa and the second largest African investor in the continent.

Morocco greatly appreciates China's continued contributions to the development of Africa.

"China's assistance to Africa over the years has benefited the African people," King Mohammed VI said during his visit to Beijing, adding that his country "stands ready to become China's important cooperative partner in the African continent."

Apart from that, Morocco enjoys strong relations with Arab and European countries.

The combination of all these factors make of Morocco a trusted partner in implementing China's initiative. The kingdom anticipates great opportunities.

"The Belt and Road Initiative heralds a new era of cooperation that will benefit all. Morocco embraces the initiative fully and is optimistic about it," Laalej said.

The Belt and Road Initiative will bring countless opportunities to Moroccan economy, that's for sure, he underlined, adding that Morocco and China are committed to a strategic partnership, and the initiative will definitely boost that framework, both economically and socially.

Morocco experienced the benefits of the old Maritime Silk Road, and with its standing as a gateway in Africa, the country is looking ahead for more beneficial cooperation within the Belt and Road Initiative.