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Formalization of the Africa-Asia Research Platform (A-ARP) of the University of Dar es Salaam: Fostering Spirit of Unity and Integration

1. Preamble

Based on reflections of the 1955 Asian-African Conference (Bandung) and fuelled by the recent initiatives of the Africa-Asia Collaborative Framework (the 2012 Roundtable in Lusaka; the 2015 A-Asia conference in Accra; the 2018 A-Asia conference in Dar es Salaam; the 2020 workshop in Kasetsart Bangkok; and the future 2021 A-Asia conference in Saint-Louis, it was necessary for the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) to initiate and eventually set to launch the Africa-Asia Research Platform (A-ARP).

Having three constituent colleges (two for education and one for health), six campus colleges at the Mlimani Main Campus, five schools, five specialized academic Institutes (including the Confucius Institute), nine Directorates, twelve Centres (including Korean Studies, Chinese Studies, Indian Studies Centres), four Bureaus, four Service units and one Company, UDSM had been experiencing diversities in engaging with Asia. Establishment and formalization of the A-ARP not only bring together the UDSM faculty and graduate students from across the university with scholars from different parts of the world to identify key areas for research, theoretical and practical interventions and knowledge production and exchange (and/or sharing) but also enhance the spirit of unity and integration that is delivered by engaging with Asia in its entirety rather than in blocs and compartmentalization.

This paper documents the trails of fostering the unity and integration through Africa-Asia collaborative networks and situates the A-ARP on the same while highlighting an acceleration of the viable possibility of intervening in and reshaping the prevailing Africa-Asia collaborative interventions. The paper emphasizes the enduring lessons of the Bandung spirit residing in the challenges of resolving the tensions over the appropriate context for pursuing self-determination and paves ways for re-emergence of Africa-Asia concrete collaborative initiatives built in the sense of unity and integration.

2. Africa-Asia Collaborative Networks and the Prospects of the A-ARP

Africa-Asia relations in Tanzania (the then Tanganyika before the union between the same with Zanzibar) dates back many years. During struggles for independence from colonial powers, Tanganyika opted to align with some countries in Asia in various development interventions and extended the political

diplomatic relationships. One of the concrete examples, is the relationship that has been existing to date between the states and peoples of the United Republic of Tanzania and the People's Republic of China (Sino-Tanzania Relations). The two countries have enjoyed a very special relationship that dates back from the days of the generation of leadership of the founding fathers of these nations, namely the late Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere and Abeid A. Karume on the part of Tanzania; Chairman Mao Zedong, Premier Zhou Enlai and later Supreme Leader Deng Xioping on the part of China.

During the period of decolonization of Africa, China stood firmly behind the plight of the oppressed African. China was among the very first countries of the world (clearly the first Asian country) to come out boldly in the open to recognize the 1964 Zanzibar Revolution. Also, when Tanzania was spear-heading the liberation struggle, notably in the Southern African region, China was always there in the ready for moral and material support. To date, China stands out to be Tanzania's most reliable ally of all times. On her part, Tanzania was boldly and relentlessly in support of China until the cherished right of the People's Republic of China to be reinstated permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations was secured. Tanzania has also never wavered in her support to the **One China** policy until it has gained wide international acceptance.

The cordial and friendly relationship was not restricted to political and diplomatic relations alone. Economically, China collaborated with Tanzania to establish the Tanzania-China Friendship (*urafiki*) Textile Company in the 1960s. Furthermore, it was China which took over the offer to construct the Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA) in the 1970s when developed countries turned the project down, setting a good living example of Chinese selflessness to Tanzania. In this project, China again lived up to the spirit of the adage "***a friend in need is a friend indeed***" with respect to Tanzania. Other highly significant and conspicuous symbols of Chinese friendly support to Tanzania include the Amaan Stadium in Zanzibar built in the 1970s, housing schemes in Zanzibar built from the 1990s to date, the Dodoma Urban Water Rehabilitation and Chalinze Water Supply Projects completed in 2003. Also significant are the China-Tanzania Shipping Company (SINOTASHIP) and the Chinese Medical Teams which are regularly renewed on both Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar¹. China has also recently helped Tanzania in the construction of the ultra-modern Olympic standard National Stadium in Dar es Salaam which is part of a bigger sports complex co-financed by our two governments at an estimated total cost of 56.4 million dollars. To date the relationship between China and Tanzania have over the times reached down to the people themselves. If you go to Guangzhou now you will find curious Tanzanian traders busy bargaining on Chinese products to send back home, the distance and their limited business capitals notwithstanding. On the other hand, if you go to Tanzania (Dar es Salaam significantly) you will find Chinese ranging from street hawkers to world class investors. The trend has been increasing to other regions in the country. Chinese and Tanzanians are now marrying each other and establish families.

Tanzania has also been spearheading relations with other countries in Asia including India (where from the 1960s to the 1980s, both countries had the same view on anti-racism and anti-colonialism), Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Palestine, South Korea, Indonesia and Vietnam (whereas both countries have signed diplomatic missions on 14th February 1965). This description clearly depicts how strong ties between Tanzania and countries from Asia have been although it does not deny the fact that Tanzania has been having relations with other countries in Europe, America and other continents.

Irrespective such relations ranging from political, economic and even cultural, less achievements can be documented in terms of networks emanating from collaborative research and studies. While there are existing exchange programmes and academic relations between scholars and dons in higher and even lower learning institutions, concrete formed collaborative networks built in the sense of unity and integration are scarce. The University of Dar es Salaam as stated witnessed a concrete anchoring of such networks during the 2018 A-Asia : A New Axis of Knowledge International Conference held in Dar

¹ See for example <https://cn.tzembassy.go.tz/about/category/sino-tanzania>

es Salaam and at the University of Dar es Salaam. Our organizing committee worked hand in hand with the IIAS-ICAS team and other partners, while driving locally the spirit of making this international conference possible, including shaping an entire programme, organising the panels per 9 broad themes, choosing the keynotes, etc. just to mention a few. The conference which attracted more than 400 participants from regions that were not present in the first edition in Accra Ghana in 2015 (including from North Africa and the Maghreb, from Central and Eastern Europe, from Southeast Asia, the Middle-East, Western Asia and Central Asia). It was noted during the conference that there were more participants from francophone African countries – though still too few from Lusophone areas. There were also participants from Latin America, North America, Oceania, South, and East Asia, and from Western Europe. The conference became not only a platform for fostering collaboration, unity and integration between Africa and Asia but also a concrete global space, and a shining example of locally driven engagement that inspires even beyond the spatiality of the two continents.

The idea of initiating the A-ARP came out of this conference. With already established ties and relations between the University of Dar es Salaam and for instance the Calicut University, University of Ghana, University Gaston Berger (Senegal), Airlangga University (Indonesia), Ibadan University (Nigeria), Vietnam National University, University of Zambia, and Kasetsart University (Thailand), Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Henry Luce Foundation, Michigan University, Réunion University, National University of Singapore, Social Sciences Research Council, Leiden University, IIAS, Andrew Mellon Foundation, the academic publisher Taylor and Francis, *Itinerario* journal, the A-ARP sets a platform that seeks to contribute into being a novel kind of trans-regional 'Africa-Asia studies' platform. This will help in the realization of the viable possibility of intervening in and reshaping the prevailing Africa-Asia collaborative interventions, with more opportunities that assure success.

3. Conclusion and Way Forward

The collapse of the colonial system and independence struggles of the peoples of Africa and Asia and other regions of the world which led to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) were important in the decolonization process, leading to the attainment of independence by many countries in both Africa and Asia. The Bandung Asian-African Conference is seen by many of us as the most immediate antecedent to the creation of Non-Aligned Movement. While historically, African and Asian countries have shown resilience to overcome their differences and found a common ground for actions leading to mutual cooperation and upholding of shared values, there is a need to continue fostering unity and integration through enhancing the historical, cultural, and linguistic relation, interaction/cooperation between the two largest continents using evidence based research and academic relations through collaborative networks. A-ARP is geared towards realization of this ambition.