

## **The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership will Usher in a Brighter Future for China-Tonga Relations**

*By H.E. Mr. Cao Xiaolin, Chinese Ambassador to Tonga*

China-Tonga relations have maintained good momentum since our two countries established diplomatic ties in November, 1998. I was lucky to be posted in the Chinese embassy for two years immediately after the establishment of the diplomatic relations between China and Tonga. I was happy to come back again, in the capacity of the Chinese ambassador, on 1<sup>st</sup> January this year. I had the honor to present to His Majesty King Tupou VI the Letter of Credence from His Excellency President Xi Jinping on 25<sup>th</sup> February.

I have seen with pride the sound and stable development of the China-Tonga relations over the past 22 years, and will exert my best efforts to promote the friendship between our peoples and the exchanges and cooperation between our two countries in various fields during my tenure of office.

The world is undergoing major developments, transformation and adjustment. Never have we seen such close interdependence between countries as today, and never have we had so many complicated challenges as today. The world is heading toward a community of shared future for mankind to achieve common development and to address the challenges as well.

Under such circumstances and at the starting point of the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I wish to share some of my thoughts on the future development of China-Tonga relations with my Tongan friends.

The Chinese Government has attached great importance to China-Tonga relations since the two countries established diplomatic ties. China has all along seen Tonga as a true friend and important partner in the Pacific island region. The exchanges and contacts at different levels between our two countries are frequent and close, with fruitful results in cooperation in various fields.

It is worth mentioning that His Majesty King Tupou VI paid a successful state visit to China in March, 2018. During the visit, President Xi Jinping and His Majesty King Tupou VI reached many important consensuses on the further development of China-Tonga relations. In November of the same year, President Xi Jinping met with the Hon. Prime Minister of Tonga on the sideline of the APEC Summit in Papua

New Guinea, and the two sides agreed to elevate the China-Tonga relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership of mutual respect and common development, setting out a blueprint for our future bilateral relations. Against such backdrop, I suggest that China and Tonga deepen cooperation in the following areas:

**First, we should work to build an inclusive world through exchanges and mutual learning.** For the international community, the most inclusive issue is that all countries have rights to chose development paths suited to their national conditions, and make contributions to human civilizations. Diversity in human civilizations not only defines our world, but also drives human progress. There are more than 200 countries and regions, over 2500 ethnic groups, and multiple religions in the world. China has all along respected the diversity in human civilizations. The Chinese civilization is one of the ancient civilizations in the world, with its main manifestation in the socialist system with Chinese characteristics under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. Tonga is a country of a unique history, culture and tradition with a special influence in the Pacific island region, and has been hailed as a pearl in the world civilizations. Both China and Tonga are now taking a development path suited to our own national conditions. The two countries should achieve common prosperity and make the world civilizations more colorful through mutual learning and deepened exchanges.

**Second, we should uphold equality and mutual trust, support each other's core interests and major concerns.** China wishes to develop friendly relations and cooperation with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and holds that all countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are equal members of the international community. China and Tonga have always respected each other as equals, and understood and supported each other on issues bearing on our respective core interests and major concerns. China-Tonga relations stand out as a fine example for friendly cooperation between countries that are different in size and have different social systems. China appreciates that the Kingdom of Tonga adheres to the one-China principle, and hopes that Tonga will not have any official communication with Taiwan. It is an important pursuit of the Tongan government to improve the people's livelihood. China will continue to support Tonga in developing economy and improving people's standard of living within its ability.

**Third, we should deepen the cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative(BRI) to achieve high-quality common development.** The BRI is a cooperation proposal put forward by President Xi Jinping in 2013, with the purpose to connect the development of China with that of

the world and to promote a common prosperity for all the countries in the world. Until now, China has signed 200 cooperation agreements on building the Belt and Road with 138 countries and 30 international organizations. The BRI involves countries in different regions, at different development stages and with different cultures. It is a platform of open and inclusive cooperation, and a public product jointly made by parties concerned to the whole world.

We are pleased to see that the mutually beneficial cooperation between China and Tonga in various fields, particularly in economy, trade, infrastructure, clean energy, agriculture and health, has yielded fruitful results and promoted the economic and social development of Tonga. China helped build landmarks, such as the government building and the conference center, to improve the working conditions of the Tongan Government. China helped build sidewalks and roads in Tongatapu for better traffic conditions and tourism development. China helped build solar power station to assist Tonga in coping with the climate change and achieving the goal of clean energy development. The agricultural cooperation has greatly diversified the everyday food and provided more choices of healthy diet for Tongan people. The Chinese medical team is busy with their services to the patients in Vaiola Hospital every day. In a word, the cooperation between China and Tonga has brought tangible benefits to the Tongan people.

Located on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road, Tonga is an important cooperation partner in BRI. China and Tonga signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the Cooperation in building the Belt and Road in 2018, which has set up a broad platform and created a historic opportunity for the development of our bilateral ties. With this MOU, our two countries can explore new areas for cooperation, tap the potentials for cooperation in science and technology, characteristic agriculture and fishery, so as to increase both the added value of Tongan products and the efficiency of cooperation between China and Tonga. In this way, our joint efforts will help Tonga transform the advantages in natural conditions and human resources into development opportunities to achieve a better economic growth.

**Fourth, we should work to promote the people-to-people contacts so as to consolidate the popular support for our friendship.** Though the vast Pacific Ocean separates China and Tonga, it connects the hearts of the people of our two countries. Under the leadership of HRH Princess Pilolevu Tuita, the Tonga-China Friendship Association has set up a bridge connecting the Chinese people and the Tongan people, and has promoted the China-Tonga friendship stronger and stronger.

China and Tonga have signed an agreement on visa exemption to

facilitate the people-to-people contacts. Up to now, more than 300 Tongan students have completed their studies at universities in China under the Chinese Government Scholarships. Around 1,200 Tongan government officials and people from different sectors attended workshops and training classes in China. Sister city relationship has been established between Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Vava'u, between Dongguan city and Ha'apai, and between Hainan province and 'Eua. China wishes to strengthen the exchanges and cooperation with Tonga in education, culture, tourism, sports, and is ready to set up a Confucius Institute in Tonga for more Tongan students to learn Chinese culture. China will encourage more Chinese tourists to visit Tonga so that more jobs will be created in tourism here in the Friendly Islands. Exchanges at the level of local governments will also be deepened for closer friendship and more tangible benefits to the people between our two countries.

**Fifth, we should enhance our coordination in regional and international affairs to safeguard our common interests.** Both China and Tonga are developing countries. Sharing similar positions on many major international and regional issues, China and Tonga have played an important and positive role in maintaining stability in this region. The global governance and security issues have become more and more prominent over the past years. It is in the interests of both China and Tonga, as strategic partners, to have a closer coordination and collaboration in the international and regional affairs, particularly to respond to the challenges of climate change and infectious diseases, to safeguard the interests of the developing countries. China wishes to work with Tonga and the other countries to forge a new form of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation to contribute to the stability and development in this region.

Now, the world is fighting COVID-19. China and Tonga have maintained close communication and cooperation in combating the Pandemic, sharing weal and woe over the past few months. The Tongan people from all walks of life supported the Chinese people with their warm words and donations. The Chinese government and the Chinese people are providing medical aid to Tonga to improve its capability to respond to COVID-19. We can say that China and Tonga have become a community of common destiny to safeguard the health security of mankind. I am confident that, with concerted efforts, the comprehensive strategic partnership of mutual respect and common development between China and Tonga will reach new heights and embrace a brighter future.