

Hosting Fifty African Ministers in South Korea Reflects Its Economic and Regional Weight

(Translated)

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The presence of the foreign ministers of 50 African countries in Seoul, the capital of South Korea, on June 2nd, arranged independently by the Korean government, is considered—in principle—a high-level political success, and indeed, in diplomatic terms, a truly historic event.

The South Korean-African conference was not limited to the presence of 50 foreign ministers from most African countries in the first joint ministerial meeting with South Korea. In addition to the foreign ministers, the meeting was also attended by heads of delegations representing several important African regional organizations such as the African Union, the African Development Bank and the African Continental Free Trade Area. The conference was held under the title: “Korea-Africa Partnership for Joint Response Amid Global Transformation.” South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun opened the conference by emphasizing the need to adapt to the rapid transformations in the international order, and the resulting disruptions to supply chains and increasing concerns about food and energy security, which has made Africa more important than ever on the geopolitical and economic stage.

The meeting of African delegations in Seoul aimed to strengthen economic cooperation between South Korea and African nations, hoping to address global challenges, particularly those related to supply chains, energy, and food security. South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun stated, “The meeting is being held at a time of rapid global change, with the world facing multifaceted challenges related to supply, energy, and food.” He emphasized that, given the ongoing instability in the Middle East and the uncertainty surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, “African countries are gaining increasing geopolitical and economic importance, making close cooperation between Seoul and African nations more crucial than ever.”

The African participants discussed various issues with their South Korean counterparts, including trade, investment, science and technology, supply chains, climate change, healthcare, security, and development.

On the sidelines of the summit, approximately 300 African private sector representatives, including business leaders, institutional representatives, and experts, held bilateral meetings with South Korean officials to discuss new investment opportunities, industrial cooperation, and strengthening supply chains.

South Korea’s interest in the African continent stems from its growing awareness of the continent's strategic importance due to its energy and mineral resources, and because it has become an international arena for open competition on the global stage. Africa's geopolitical and economic importance is increasing for several reasons, including the instability in the Middle East and the closure of the Strait of

Hormuz. This makes cooperation between South Korea and African countries “an urgent necessity,” as Cho Hyun stated during his opening remarks at the first session of the conference, in which he described Africa as the continent of the future. He based his statement on three main factors:

1. Its demographic strength, with a large youth population.
2. Its strategic location at the crossroads of maritime routes between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and the Gulf of Aden.
3. Its vast reserves of vital minerals used in artificial intelligence data centers.

This conference undoubtedly comes within the framework of South Korea’s efforts to strengthen its presence in the African continent and expand economic, trade, and investment cooperation. It is considering organizing additional events and summits in the coming years, including another summit on minerals to enhance trade relations, as well as a third summit in 2029 to further develop the strategic partnership between the two sides.

South Korea is currently an economically advanced nation, ranking as the third largest economy in Asia after China and Japan. It is the fourth largest country in the world in patent registrations, after China, the United States, and Japan, and ahead of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. It also ranks thirteenth globally in terms of total economic size.

South Korea is a militarily powerful nation, possessing some of the strongest domestically produced missile defense systems, making it one of the world’s leading countries in the missile and missile defense fields, second only to the major powers.

These advantages make South Korea a truly major regional power. While it cooperates with the United States against China, it is not a US satellite state in the conventional political sense. Its leaders are not agents, and it has a system of government with well-established capitalist institutions. These institutions thwarted the former president’s plans to overthrow elected governments last year, removing him from power despite the army’s support, and bringing him to trial on charges of high treason.

This conference, recently organized by South Korea with leaders of African nations, places it among the major powers vying for control of the continent's resources. It also puts it face-to-face with China, which is rapidly expanding its influence across Africa with its massive development projects, projects that neither the United States nor any other Western nation has been able to halt. Therefore, the United States has been forced to enlist South Korea’s help in countering China.

If South Korea succeeds in establishing a foothold in Africa, it will signify its transition from a local political level to a regional one, perhaps even paving the way for global influence in the future.