

Promoting Global Cooperation in the Fight against the Epidemic with a High-quality Development of the Belt and Road

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The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a major strategic move for China to expand its opening-up and a top-level design for its economic diplomacy. It is a sort of public goods provided by China in its participation in global governance and an important practice for building a community with a shared future for mankind. On June 18, 2020, a video conference on Belt and Road cooperation was held in Beijing. President Xi Jinping sent a written speech to the meeting, proposing to build the Belt and Road into a cooperative road to unite countries and to meet challenges, a healthy road to safeguard people's health security, a road to recovery that promotes economic and social recovery, and a road of growth that releases development potential. That pointed out a new direction for the high-quality development of the BRI.

Unity is the foundation: to build a road of cooperation that unites countries in meeting challenges

The epidemic is an accelerator for the major changes unseen in a century, and many international consensus have been subverted and reshaped. This epidemic is the third major event that has changed the world's agenda in the 21st century. The first two were the 9 • 11 attack in 2001 and the global financial crisis in 2008. Major events since 2017, such as the trade war launched by the US and Brexit, have exerted a negative impact on the international community. The Covid-19 epidemic has intensified the impact, leading to a significant increase in instability and uncertainties. Many countries, have therefore, felt unprecedentedly helpless. Looking back at history, there are precedents for major international crises strengthening international cooperation or intensifying competition. Trust, peace, development and governance deficits, and even solidarity deficits are serious challenges that all mankind needs to deal with together.

The Belt and Road international cooperation is facing challenges. In fighting the epidemic, many countries have locked down cities and even the countries for public health reasons; many international cooperation projects have stopped. However, BRI will not stop.

It is necessary to strengthen the unity of the international community through building a global partnership of connectivity; to practice multilateralism and align with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is necessary to precisely align cooperation projects with the 17 UN SDGs, with particular efforts to

eradicate poverty and hunger, improve people's health and well-being, and to boost technological innovation.

Health is a prerequisite: to build a road of health that safeguards

people's health security

Public health crises have always been a severe challenge facing human society, and people's health is a top priority for all countries. The Covid-19 epidemic has led to the unemployment and dropping-outs of a large number of young people, with possible psychological trauma that are difficult to heal in their lives. An ILO report recognizes that more than one-sixth of young people have become unemployed, and 42% of those who are still in their jobs have experienced a income decline.

Most of the countries all the Belt and Road are developing ones, which generally suffer from public health challenges. Statistics show that only 3% of medicines in Africa are produced locally, and 70% of the world's population lack adequate medical services. Therefore, in the construction of the Belt and Road, public health cooperation has been regarded as a fundamental task. In as early as 2015, the National Health and Family Planning Commission of China issued a *Three-year Implementation Plan for Promoting the Belt and Road Health Exchanges and Cooperation (2015-2017)*. Despite the achievements on the above-mentioned efforts, there were still few landmark projects and branded projects for public health cooperation in the BRI framework before the outbreak.

It is necessary to actively promote the construction of a Silk Road of Health and create a community of health for human beings. The top priority here is to stop the spread of the virus and safeguard public health security around the world. After the epidemic, the need for cooperation in this field among countries will boom sharply. In the framework of the Silk Road of Health, we must accelerate the construction of public health infrastructure, and improve the efficiency and sustainability of global public health system that can benefit all mankind. It is necessary to fully mobilize the enthusiasm of enterprises in all countries to give a hand in building a community of health for human beings. It's also needed to further strengthen international cooperation on the prevention and control of infectious diseases, on maternal and child health, health assistance, vaccine development. We also need to provide public goods in the health field such as health education and personnel training .

Recovery is a key: to build a road to recovery that promotes

economic and social recovery

Due to the epidemic, the global economy will enter a period of severe recession. On April 14, 2020, the International Monetary Fund issued a report,

predicting that global GDP growth will shrink by 3% in 2020. This is the first world-wide crisis that could drag both developed and emerging economies into recession since the Great Depression in the 1930s.

The epidemic has made BRI countries turning more inwards, with shrinking demand for infrastructure, trade, and investment. Orders for many industrial parks in BRI countries have reduced sharply, making it more difficult to attract investment. Many companies have also switched to producing pharmaceutical materials. As far as financial support is concerned, international capital is generally constrained, and international financial institutions invest with caution. At the same time, we are hearing louder voices in Western countries for industry flowing back and economic decoupling, leading to bigger pressure for the economic recovery in affected countries.

It is necessary to encourage the construction of a Digital Silk Road and inject catalysts for economic and social recovery. It is necessary to strengthen the coordination of macroeconomic policies and promote an orderly resumption of work and production with the help of BRI. The initiative needs to put more focus on cooperation in sectors of digital economy, medical industry and food safety, and cultivate new economic growth points through e-commerce, smart cities, artificial intelligence and big data applications, and strive to narrow existing digital divide.

In December 2018, the Belgian government and Alibaba signed an agreement to make the country the first European co-founder of the global electronic trade platform. To ensure a timely delivery of anti-epidemic supplies in the epidemic, Alibaba's Cainiao Network increased the frequency of charter flights from Hangzhou to Liege Airport in Belgium to five flights per week. The eWTP hub in Liege has become not only a rescue center in Europe, but also the main center of cross-border trade recovery. The freight volume between Liege Airport and China increased by 7% year-on-year.

In short, there is a broad space for improvement in the Belt and Road digital infrastructure. A series of digital technologies and services such as the Internet of Things (IoT), 5G, artificial intelligence, and cloud computing will inevitably have become the most prominent growth points in the Belt and Road international cooperation.

Growth is a guarantee: to build a growth path that unlocks

development potential

The world economic growth is losing momentum with more complexities. The BRI is a successful example of inclusive growth for the global economy. In essence, it is to generate new demand and rebalance the world economy through increasing effective supply. The epidemic has affected not only politics and economy, but also social psychology and ideologies. Many existing imbalances and

the fragmentation of the international trading system has become more and more obvious.

It is necessary to maintain a strategic determination to build the Belt and Road. The BRI countries are very willing to cooperate, hoping to boost their own development through international BRI cooperation.

In the future, it is necessary to set high standards, improve people's livelihood, and align with sustainable goals. To ensure benefits for people, and to fill the gap of the BRI countries in access to public health resources, China could consider establishing Li Shizhen Pharmacy and Huatuo Hospitals on the basis of its experience with Confucius Institutes and Luban Workshops.

The exemplifying role of production capacity cooperation should be emphasized to help developing countries with industrialization and modernization. Many BRI countries have put a priority on agriculture but lack of public health service capacity. Therefore, we should strengthen the construction of featured parks, such as parks of agricultural industries and of pharmaceutical industries. We should further out cooperation on food production and processing, agricultural product trade, medicine and health, etc.

After seven years of efforts, the Belt and Road construction has become a focus of China's efforts in developing a new pattern of all-round opening in the new era; a highlight of the country's major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics; and a channel in offering regional and global public goods. The global epidemic has challenged this initiative in many ways, but fully proves the resilience and vitality of the Belt and Road cooperation. After the test of the epidemic, it will bloom with new vitality, injecting stronger impetus into the efforts of building a community with a shared future for mankind and facilitating global governance.

