Tillerson criticizes China on Africa

2018-03-07

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 China Daily USA |  
 Updated: 2018-03-07 23:16

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson took a jab at China on Tuesday before embarking on his first trip to Africa as the country's top diplomat.  
Speaking at George Mason University in Virginia, Tillerson accused China of "encouraging dependency using opaque contracts, predatory loan practices and corrupt deals that mire nations in debt and undercut their sovereignty, denying them their long-term, self-sustaining growth".  
"Chinese investment does have the potential to address Africa's infrastructure gap, but its approach has led to mounting debt and few, if any, jobs in most countries," he said before leaving for a five-nation trip that includes Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria.  
In Beijing on Tuesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang already rebuked similar accusations by a US State Department official made on March 2.  
He called the allegations "completely inconsistent with the fact".  
Geng said the debt owed by some African countries was accumulated over a long period of time instead of occurring in recent years, and China is not a main creditor of African countries.  
"Financing support is indispensable for any country which is at the stage of economic takeoff, especially the initial stage of industrialization. Without financing, it would be difficult for African countries to achieve industrialization and modernization," Geng said.  
China's financing support to Africa is mainly invested in infrastructure construction and productivity. Chinese companies have built a large number of infrastructure projects such as highways, railways, ports, airports and communications facilities in Africa, which have greatly improved the environment for Africa's economic development, added to its appeal to foreign investment and enhanced its capability to achieve self-driven development, according to Geng.  
He said the Chinese government has also encouraged Chinese companies to make direct investment in Africa and actively explores new investment cooperation model such as the public-private partnership.  
Geng stressed that China always attaches high importance to Africa's debt sustainability. "While pursuing the economic and social benefits of the relevant projects, we have also laid emphasis on enhancing African countries' capability for independent and sustainable development so as to avoid adding to African countries' debt burden," he said.  
He hopes that "relevant countries can contribute more to Africa's development and view China-Africa cooperation in a fair and objective way".  
The New York Times, said Tillerson, while a former chief executive at Exxon Mobil, had pushed deals in African countries "widely accused of corruption and poor human rights".  
US trade with Africa is dominated by crude petroleum exports, accounting for 90 percent of all bilateral trade.  
China is Africa's largest trade partner. An Ernst & Young report also showed that in 2016, China was Africa's single largest contributor of foreign direct investment capital and jobs.

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