

# The African Economic Safari of Mohammed VI

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In one of his inspiring and insightful speeches, the late king Hassan II described Morocco as a big tree with its roots deeply buried in Africa, its trunk in the Arab-Muslim world, and its branches in Europe. The country is, therefore, the gate of Europe unto Africa and vice versa. His successor, King Mohammed VI, is currently making this metaphor come true. Indeed, besides strengthening ties with Europe, in particular, and the West, in general, he is diving into Africa in search of the roots and the sources of Moroccan culture in order to enhance ties and strengthen exchange within the continent.

Islam was introduced into Africa by the Amazigh Dynasties of the Almoravids (1040–1147) and Almohads (1121–1269) between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. The Empire of Morocco subsequently began a lucrative trade with the people of this continent and caravans started as far north as the city of Sefrou, inhabited by Muslim and Jewish merchants.

With the caravan trade, Moroccan religious influence spread through the African continent mainly through the Sufi teachings of Sidi Ahmad al-Tijani (1735–1815). Al-Tijani lived in Fes and founded the Tijani religious tariqa under the reign of the sultan Moulay Slimane (1766–1822), who treated him well despite his dislike of Sufi orders. Today, the populations of much of West Africa are in many ways disciples of his lodge and are referred to as Tidjane.

On his accession to the Alouite throne in 1999, the taciturn Moroccan monarch Mohammed VI, in sharp contrast to his eloquent father, spoke little but believed strongly in deeds and acts. On the 63rd anniversary of the thawrat al-malik wa cha'b (Revolution of the King and the People), Mohammed VI, in a nationally-televised speech on August 20, 2016, proclaimed that Africa is a “top priority” and that “this multi-dimensional relationship puts Morocco in the center of Africa”. He went on to stress that “Africa holds a special place in the heart of Moroccans.”

Almost two decades later, in January 2017, Morocco rejoined the African Union (AU) after a 33 year political absence from this institution, despite its economic contributions to the continent. Indeed, Morocco drives 85% of its direct foreign investment to Africa, in an effective demonstration of the “south-south cooperation,” a sacrosanct regional economic philosophy. It has, for example, a sizable fertilizer company that has built plants in various countries and provides them with agricultural consultation. Morocco’s telecom company Itissalat al-Maghrib also owns cell phone companies in many countries where it is developing the infrastructure and preparing the ground for fiber optic technology. With Nigeria, Morocco is planning to build a huge pipeline to deliver its oil to European and Western

client countries.

The economic cooperation is also bringing Moroccan know-how and long-term experience to the banking and insurance services. Morocco offers scholarships to thousands of African students to undertake tertiary education at Moroccan universities and higher education institutes. It trains army personnel in its military schools and religious clergy in its famed Imam Academy.

This fruitful and win-win economic venture is estimated at billions of dollars and creates thousands of jobs for African youth while bringing wealth and development to their countries. Though this cooperation is making many sub-Saharan countries grateful to Morocco, Algeria, for example, is not happy because they feel it threatens its petrodollar hegemony and political influence. Indeed, Algerian officials, along with eight of their allies, not only voted against the re-admission of Morocco into the AU, but also argued that the Kingdom is using economic cooperation with the African continent to serve the interests of the West by opening the markets to multinational companies' products in order to counter Chinese influence.

On Morocco's re-admission in the African fold via the AU during the last African Summit in Adis Ababa, Mohammed VI expressed his satisfaction at the outcome by saying that he is happy to be back home in the continent. Undoubtedly his joy will mean more exchange, more development, and more wealth for everyone.

Africa is undoubtedly the future of humanity; this is not a cliché, it is reality. It has the resources, natural and human diversity, aspiring youth, and iron will to step into action and make things happen for the benefit of its peoples. There is, no doubt, a lot the world can learn from this continent. Was it not, after all, the cradle of humanity? The world must help Morocco politically and financially in its positive African development safari for the benefit of all. ❖

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