

Morocco Believes Brazil's Technology Can Help Africa and Arab Countries

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
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The importance of cooperation between developing countries is part of the vision of the president of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and also of the king of Morocco, Mohamed VI. The statement was made by the minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Arab country, Mohamed Benaïssa, who was in Brazil this week, as part of a tour to 10 Latin American countries.

In an interview at Cumbica Airport, in São Paulo, in transit from Brazilian capital Brasília to Assunción, in Paraguai, Benaïssa talked about the next Summit of South American-Arab Countries, to be held next year in Morocco.

World peace, according to the minister, should be one of the themes of the Summit. Benaïssa believes that South-South cooperation may contribute to the world peace process.

Another theme of the Summit should be trade and investment exchange between the Arab and South American worlds, according to Benaïssa. Brazil and Morocco have already scheduled, for July, a meeting of a joint commission to address the cooperation between the two countries.

Brazil, according to the minister, can contribute with its know-how and technology to the development of Arab and African countries.

The main mission of the minister, in his trip through Latin America, is to introduce the proposal that his country is going to submit to the United Nations, in April, for Western Sahara.

Morocco is going to request for the region to have autonomy regarding internal affairs, but to be considered as Moroccan territory.

In Brasília, where his visit was centered, the minister was received by the vice president José Alencar, by Foreign Minister Celso Amorim, and by the president of the Lower House, Arlindo Chinaglia.

In Brasília, Benaïssa was accompanied by the Moroccan ambassador to Brazil, Farida Jaïdi, and during his quick stay in the capital of the southeastern Brazilian state of São Paulo, he was received by the consul of Morocco, Hilton Peña. Farida travelled along with the minister, since she is also the ambassador of the Arab country to Paraguay. Before coming to Brazil, Benaïssa was in Argentina.

Below are the main stretches of the minister's interview:

What is the reason for your coming to Brazil right now?

I was sent on a mission by his majesty, the king Mohamed VI, to 10 Latin American countries. The objective is to explain the royal initiative aimed at solving the problem of the (Western) Sahara. The conflict has lasted more than thirty years. Everything has been attempted. There has been war, there have been United Nations (UN) troops and we could not reach a solution.

Morocco wants to get past the impasse, because we have been in the UN Security Council for two years without any perspective. Algerians insist on the independence of the territory. Moroccans, on the other hand, complain that (the Sahara) is part of their territory. The region has always been Moroccan territory, it was never a state, it never had its own identity.

And if we are to mention the Sahrawi (the peoples that live in the Sahara), we must speak of the Sahrawi along a range of one million square kilometres, in Algeria, Mauritania... there are no geographical limits for these populations.

For that reason, the king launched an initiative consisting of a proposal of wide-ranging, democratic autonomy, to be negotiated under the United Nations (UN), for the population of this territory, within the realm of Moroccan sovereignty and territorial integrity.

But then the Western Sahara would be a Moroccan territory?

Autonomy is not the same as independence. Autonomy means that in the territory, the population - which is of 800,000 people - will have all the attributes of self-governance. All that entails sovereignty, the flag, the currency, the military defence, the foreign relations, will be under the jurisdiction of the central government.

All that pertains to the territory, that is, health, teaching, education, culture, public works, trade, resources, juridical aspects, transportation, all will pertain to the autonomous organisations in the territory, in accordance with the sovereignty and territorial integration of Morocco. Just as São Paulo belongs in Brazil, but has its autonomy.

The letter of the king of Morocco explains the process that led to this problem. We presented, in further detail, the entire project of the king, which underwent a 15-month long national consultation, which heard all of the political parties in Morocco, and which also consulted the Saharan population.

There is an organisation called Royal Consultative Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS), comprised of 180 representatives of all tribes. The Council was also consulted, and the result was presented to the king. The king then decided to consult the friendly, brotherly countries, such as Brazil, to hear advice, comments, and to eventually obtain their support. In April, we will submit the plan to the United Nations Security Council.

Minister Benaïssa, in 2008 Morocco will host the Summit of South American-Arab Countries. Was this also a matter of discussion in your meeting with Brazilian authorities?

In addition to discussing the royal message, I also had an opportunity to discuss bilateral relations with my colleague and great friend Celso Amorim. We decided to gather together the large joint Moroccan-Brazilian commission that is going to deal with aspects of the economic and trade relations between the two countries.

At first, we decided to hold the meeting next July in Rabat. We also discussed president Lula's initiative of establishing a group of Arab and South American countries, which was the summit in Brasília, in 2005. The second summit will be held in Morocco in 2008.

Which should be the main issue for the next summit?

You are well aware that the key issue in the world today is peace, security, stability. The region surrounding Morocco, the desert, the Sahara, is infested with trafficking of drugs, guns and humans. All of this poses a big problem. The Arab world is also going through a drama of conflicts and wars, in Iraq, in Lebanon, the nuclear crisis in Iran, Darfur, in Sudan and Somalia.

There is also the problem of the (Western) Sahara, there are other issues in Algeria and throughout the whole Sahara. We are living a period of restlessness regarding world peace. This is precisely why we want to solve the issue of Sahara in an immediate and definite fashion, in a fair and democratic manner, abiding by international legality. We are willing to negotiate this autonomy (of the Western Sahara) within the scope of the United Nations.

Are trade relations going to be in the schedule?

I believe that one very interesting subject for the countries involved is how to increase trade exchange, how to increase the exchange of investments between South American and Arab countries. Another issue is how to make room for a better knowledge in cultural relations between Arab and South American countries. And naturally we, Arabs, want to contribute with Southern countries to reinforce South-South cooperation.

This is part of the vision of president Lula and also of his majesty, the king of Morocco. The king is a huge supporter of

South-South cooperation. This is why, approximately two years ago, he travelled to some six Latin American countries and fifteen African countries. His majesty believes that a South-South cooperation may contribute in a more sensible, effective and concrete manner to world peace.

In which aspects can the relations between Brazil and Morocco achieve growth?

First of all, Brazil is a very important, widely respected country, and it plays a major role in the development of Southern countries. The experience that Brazil has is important to many countries in Africa and in the Arab world.

The Brazilian technology, the Brazilian know-how may work in many other fields, especially regarding small- and medium-sized industries in developing countries. In Morocco, Brazil has been invited to invest in the tourism sector.

Morocco is working to receive, in 2010, ten million tourists. Currently we receive 6.5 million (per year). Brazil can also participate in the large boom taking place in Morocco in the fields of infrastructure, roads, airports, ports, housing, agriculture and fishing.

Brazil is welcome in all of these fields. We can also establish a type of cooperation, which is the joint venture, with Moroccan and Brazilian capital. We have a huge field of action in which we can cooperate and work together, in all of the Western Africa, the Maghreb and Southern Europe.

In April, a meeting will be held in Morocco between ministers of the economic field in Arab and South American countries. What are they going to discuss?

These are the first joint meetings to be held between South America and the Arab countries. It is always important to start a dialogue. Furthermore, it is important that high-level officials in all countries, for trade and economy, meet each other to collaborate and cooperate.

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