MOROCCAN YOUTH COUNCIL FOR DIPLOMATIC
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Full Text of HM the King's Message to Participants in 1st African Congress on Maintenance, Preservation of Road Assets and Technical Innovation

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HIS MAJESTY KING MOHAMMED VI
MAY GOD ASSIST HIM

Full Text of HM the King’s Message to Participants in 1st African Congress on Maintenance, Preservation of Road Assets and Technical Innovation

HM King Mohammed VI addressed a message to the participants in the 1st African Congress on maintenance, preservation of road assets and technical innovation, which kicked off Wednesday in Marrakech.

Here follows the full text of the Royal message, read out by HM the King's Advisor Abdellatif Menouni:

Praise be to God
May peace and blessings be upon The Prophet, His Kith and Kin

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Marrakech, the renowned city of dialogue and cultural coexistence where historic roads to Africa merge.

I was keen to grant my patronage to this first African Conference on roads because of the special place the African continent has in my heart, because of the brotherly relations based on cooperation and solidarity with African peoples and also given that maintenance, road

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asset preservation and innovation constitute a topical subject of great importance.

Although it may seem technical, this theme actually embodies some of the major societal challenges confronting us all as Africans. To rise to those challenges, we need to have faith in our endogenous capabilities and come up with innovative approaches and solutions in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a dignified life for all African peoples.

One of the most important means of achieving the desired development is probably through the provision of basic social services and major infrastructure, particularly the road network, given the important role it plays in facilitating communication and public access to markets and basic services, reducing spatial and social disparities, attracting foreign investment, reducing production costs and increasing the cost-effectiveness of projects.

I should like to congratulate you for holding this conference and also for choosing such an important theme. No doubt this will give you the opportunity to diagnose, together, the state of the roads in Africa, the efforts made to ensure road maintenance and the main constraints faced. It will also be an opportunity to propose policy guidelines for the development of an effective, integrated strategy for the use and maintenance of road assets in Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the last decade, there has been remarkable infrastructure development in Africa thanks to complementary human and natural resources, so much so that Africa has come to be known as the continent of opportunities, given Africa’s great potential for investment.

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Nevertheless, a development challenge that still needs to be addressed in Africa is the following: we have to continue building new roads without losing sight of the need to ensure the maintenance of the existing road network, which is approximately two million kilometers long, is valued at around 30% of African countries' GDP and accounts for 90% of passenger and freight transport.

The pace of development witnessed in Africa in recent years makes it incumbent upon us to upgrade the quality of the road transport network in order to meet the mobility needs of more than a billion people in the African continent, a figure that is expected to double by the year 2050.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Growing needs for road infrastructure, a difficult balancing act between maintenance requirements and network expansion and the intensive use of road transport are all factors which complicate the mission of road agencies and officials in Africa.

Further compounding the situation are the impacts of climate change, including droughts and floods, which have significant effects on road conditions, both in terms of damage and the additional expenses needed to protect road assets and their surrounding environment.

In view of the above, modern methods need to be considered to monitor and maintain road assets and related facilities and to secure the specific data required to make the right decisions in time. Alternative solutions and techniques also need to be devised to take into account the environmental aspect, particularly through the use of clean, less polluting, environment-friendly technology.

Surely, it does not make much sense to build new roads and abandon them to their own fate. What we need are maintenance plans as well as efforts to safeguard existing roads against deterioration and, at

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times, total collapse.

To this end, special importance should be attached to the skilled human resources needed, such as engineers, senior staff and technicians who are trained through basic, practical and technical training programs. It is also important to promote specialization in this field and to keep abreast of new developments at African and international levels.

Upgrading and modernizing road management is also an urgent priority. There has to be a rational division of labor between what relates to strategy, planning, regulation and control on the one hand, and the practical, operational side, on the other, and also between road use and maintenance, and expansion and modernization of the network.

This can only be achieved through enhanced cooperation and consultation, public / private partnerships, partnerships between central government and local authorities as well as international partnerships to select the least expensive but nonetheless cost-effective solutions. Moreover, maintenance work should not focus on main roads at the expense of the rural road system, especially in remote areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
The special development agenda Morocco is pursuing under my stewardship is based on a clear, proactive policy designed to implement major projects to build the infrastructure we need. Indeed, they can serve as a lever for economic take-off and as a means to enhance Morocco’s competitiveness and attractiveness. They also play a major role in reducing spatial disparities, ensuring public access to markets and services, reducing poverty and vulnerability

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and combating social exclusion.

For more than 16 years now, Morocco has been implementing a multi-dimensional approach in the area of transport infrastructure based on the rehabilitation and modernization of the road network, the expansion and upgrading of the railway system, the development of air transport through the construction, expansion and renovation of airports and the building of major ports and logistics platforms.

In this respect, we have also been expanding our freeway and expressway network - which complies with international standards - thus linking the country’s North to the South and the East to the West, in addition to rehabilitating all categories of national roads. We have also focused on the development of secondary and rural roads to facilitate access to remote and hard to reach areas and effectively connect the rural world to the national transport system.

In addition to the major projects implemented in northern Morocco - such as the Tanger Med port complex, which has become a Mediterranean hub for international trade and maritime transport and which will be further consolidated by the Nador-West Med - we are keen to turn the Moroccan Sahara into a hub for trade and human interaction between Africa and Europe.

In this regard, and as part of the celebrations to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Green March for the recovery of our Southern Provinces, I recently launched a series of integrated projects to further link the Kingdom’s North with the South. They include the planned freeway, which complies with international standards and specifications, and which will link Agadir and Dakhla, via Tiznit and Laayun, all the way to the Mauritanian border in the South.

We will also build the Great Atlantic Port in Dakhla and consider a railway line from Tangiers to Lagouira in order to connect Morocco to

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African sister nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Building infrastructure is not an end in itself. It is part of a comprehensive vision aimed at achieving inter-regional and local development across the Kingdom. Our ultimate objective is to speed up economic growth, serve the citizens wherever they may be and give them access to all means of transport.

In addition to the quantum leap we have made in the development and modernization of the road network, a strategic plan for the next 20 years has been developed in which great importance is attached to road asset preservation. Nearly 50% of the plan’s overall investment figure is devoted to maintenance; significant funds will also go to the development of freeways and expressways and the rehabilitation of major roads.

Consistent with our integrated vision, this plan gives special importance to strategic connections with West Africa. The Moroccan southern provinces will thus constitute a bridge between Morocco and its African roots. Moreover, the construction of the Maghreb freeway, to the East, will continue in order to facilitate trade with neighboring countries.

These ambitious plans, together with major infrastructure and solar and wind energy projects, are not designed only for the development of the region. Through them, we hope to create closer bonds with African sister nations and contribute to their development as well.

Indeed, the South-South cooperation we are yearning for is not an empty slogan designed for the media; rather, we are keen to give that cooperation concrete substance through tangible projects from which

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our peoples can benefit and which pave the way for promising partnerships open to all stakeholders - both public and private - in various environmental, social and development sectors.

In this respect, Morocco commits to share with African countries the significant expertise it has gained over the years in the area of road maintenance and to exchange best practices with sister nations in this field.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, international cooperation and the exchange of information and expertise are crucial in all areas. By the same token, interaction and cooperation in the infrastructure sector between African countries, as well as between Africa and the countries of the North, will contribute to developing and modernizing this sector. They will also help safeguard it and ensure its maintenance.

African countries should therefore be involved in all initiatives aimed at boosting cooperation to improve national road networks, upgrade funding mechanisms and reflect, together, on road development policies and maintenance technology within the framework of national, regional and international professional organizations.

Thanks to the African experts and specialists attending this conference - which is the first of its kind - and given their sincere commitment to Africa, I am sure your meeting will come up with feasible, practical recommendations which will help devise adequate, innovative answers to the challenge of safeguarding, maintaining and upgrading road infrastructure in Africa, and reinforcing it with new road networks that comply with international standards.

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The participation of professional organizations, associations, experts and specialists from countries outside Africa will certainly contribute to enriching the debate and the sharing of experiences, thus further promoting North-South cooperation.

I wish your conference every success for the benefit and well-being of African peoples.

Thank you.
Wassalamu alaikum warahmatullah wabarakatuh.

MAP 04 May 2016

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