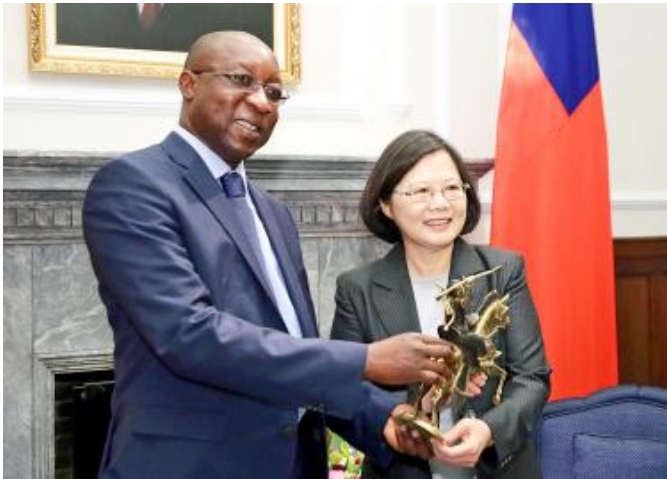


African allies say no to Chinese money

Written by Taipei Times

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President Tsai Ing-wen meets Burkinabe Prime Minister Paul Kaba Thieba at the Presidential Office on May 22 last year.

Photo provided by the Presidential Office

The nation's last two African allies have no plans to switch allegiances and break ties with Taipei, despite Beijing's efforts to woo them, officials said.

Burkina Faso will not cut relations with Taiwan, despite people and companies with links to China offering funding in return for recognition of the "one China" principle, Burkinabe Minister of Foreign Affairs Alpha Barry said.

Swaziland has also said its relationship with Taiwan is based on mutual interests, not money.

"We get outrageous proposals telling us: 'If you sign with Beijing, we'll offer you US\$50 billion or even more,'" Barry said in an interview in the capital, Ouagadougou, this month. "Taiwan is our friend and our partner. We're happy and we see no reason to reconsider the relationship."

Competition between Taiwan and China for diplomatic allies has intensified since President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) assumed office in May last year.

Asked about the nation's ties with Burkina Faso and Swaziland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Eleanor Wang (王淑惠) said by telephone: "Our relations are concrete."

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The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not immediately respond to e-mailed and faxed requests for comment.

When asked for comment, Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Wang Ding-yu (王定宇) said: “It is fortunate that certain values and friends are not for sale.”

Wang said the public needs to see the length China will go to in suppressing Taiwan’s international position, panning the Chinese government as conducting “diplomacy by handouts.”

Last month, the island nation of Sao Tome and Principe split with Taiwan because it was facing dwindling support from its traditional partners, mainly oil-producing nations hit by the slump in crude oil prices.

Taiwan said Sao Tome had asked for more than US\$100 million to maintain relations, and called the move that cut to 21 the number of its diplomatic partners “reckless and unfriendly.”

Sao Tomean Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada denied asking for money, but said the decision to break relations with Taiwan was necessary to improve the lives of the 200,000 inhabitants of the west African archipelago.

China last year resumed diplomatic relations with the Gambia, which initially recognized Taiwan before shifting to China and shifting back again to Taiwan in 1995.

When then-Gambian president Yahya Jammeh abruptly cut ties with Taiwan in 2013, then-minister of foreign affairs David Lin (林德福) said that the Gambia had made financial requests that Taipei considered unacceptable.

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That left Taiwan with Burkina Faso and Swaziland, two landlocked nations with a combined population of less than 20 million people and economies worth US\$11 billion and US\$4 billion respectively.

Burkina Faso resumed relations with Taiwan in 1994 following a 21-year hiatus, while ties between Swaziland and Taiwan date to 1968, making Swaziland the African partner with the longest history.

Swaziland says it has no plans to change its approach.

“We’re very happy with our relationship and intend to maintain it for a very long time because our friendship is based on our national interests and not on the size of Taiwan’s wallet,” Swaziland government spokesman Percy Simelane said by telephone.

Taiwan provides doctors to health facilities across the southern African nation, shares agricultural expertise and offers university scholarships.

A deputy minister of foreign affairs flew to Burkina Faso in September last year to discuss projects “and we looked at our cooperation and decided to continue,” Barry said.

The talks resulted in subsidies worth US\$47 million over the next two years in industries ranging from agriculture to education and defense, he said.

Taiwan also offers worker training programs and funds tuition for some university students.

Both countries said they would continue to lobby for Taiwan’s inclusion as a member of the UN.

“I’ve worked as an adviser in Guinea for five years,” said Barry, referring to the west African

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nation that has drawn billions of US dollars in Chinese investment because it holds the world's largest reserves of bauxite, used to make aluminum. "I know how much Beijing is worth."

Additional reporting by Yang Chun-hui

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