

New aid to Africa during President Hu's upcoming visit

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, February 07, 2009

[Xinhua](#) 8 February 2009

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

China will offer new aid to African countries during President Hu Jintao's upcoming week-long visit starting next Tuesday, a senior diplomat said on Friday.

Details of the package are still being worked out, and "China will launch a series of measures to help these countries cushion themselves from the impact of the global financial crisis on the continent," Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun told a press conference.

Hu's first visit abroad after the Lunar New Year will start with Saudi Arabia before it takes him to Mali, Senegal, Tanzania and Mauritius.

Saudi Arabia has been the largest overseas supplier of crude oil to China, exporting about 36 million tons of crude to the country last year; but Zhai said energy collaboration with Saudi Arabia is only one part of the multi-layered partnership.

He said China's bond with the African continent goes far beyond natural resources, noting that the four countries on Hu's itinerary are not rich in oil or mineral resources. The visit is more about friendship and cooperation that has benefited both China and Africa, Zhai said.

During the visit, Hu will check on the progress of projects in the aid package agreed upon during the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2006.

Zhai said China has taken concrete steps to fulfill its pledges, which included doubling aid to the continent. China has also canceled most debts owed by poor African countries.

Despite the fact that the global economic crisis is affecting China as well, "we will continue to carry out our promise to Africa and encourage our enterprises to invest there", Zhai said. "We'll work together to minimize the impact of the crisis."

Jin Canrong, deputy dean of Renmin University of China's School of International Studies, said Hu will also take the chance to thank the countries for their support in relief work after the Sichuan earthquake and during the Beijing Olympics.

Saudi Arabia made the biggest donation to China after the May 12 quake last year, while some African countries also offered help.

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