

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Indonesia vows to 'defend interests of Global South' at Africa forum

Jokowi aims for \$3.5bn in business deals at 3-day gathering in Bali

Indonesian President Joko Widodo speaks at the Indonesia-Africa Forum in Bali on Sept. 2. (Photo courtesy of Indonesia's foreign ministry)

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BALI, Indonesia -- Indonesian President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo and leaders from African nations gathered on Bali to discuss issues ranging from trade, to supply chains, to health care, as the Southeast Asian nation moves to deepen ties with the Global South and play a bigger role in the international community.

"Indonesia is committed to being part of the global solution, defending the interests of the Global South," Jokowi said Monday at the three-day Indonesia-Africa Forum (IAF), which began on Sunday. Citing geopolitical tensions and disrupted global supply chains, he warned, "International solidarity is actually declining, the spirit of multilateralism is increasingly being sidelined and fragmentation is widening."

Developing countries are the most affected by that, he stressed, saying, "We need a new direction and vision; we need a new strategy, we need new tactical steps to realize a more equitable and inclusive development for developing countries."

A total of 22 African countries sent delegates to the second IAF meeting, including current and former leaders from Zimbabwe, Rwanda and Ghana.

During his speech, Jokowi said this year's forum is expected to seal business deals worth \$3.5 billion, almost six times more than at the first IAF in 2018. Projects include geothermal energy development and work in the health technology sector.

Indonesia is focusing on policies to foster Global South's participation in international supply chains and connectivity, as well as collaboration in preparing for future pandemics, including through exports of Indonesian vaccines and other pharmaceuticals.

Indonesia is also approaching African countries to secure lithium supplies. It needs lithium to complement its wealth of nickel, another key input in lithium-ion batteries, to support its drive to develop its battery and electric vehicle industries.

"We hope to become a [production hub for materials for EVs and their batteries](#)," Vice Foreign Minister Pahala Mansury said at a media briefing ahead of the forum. "There are quite a lot of mineral materials in Africa, such as cobalt, lithium, graphite, which we hope can be related to development cooperation activities," he added.

Africa's population is growing rapidly and accounts for the largest share of global growth. Its population has expanded from 283 million in 1960 to more than 1.5 billion in 2024, a more than fivefold increase, according to the United Nations. Meanwhile, Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world, with more than 270 million people.



Indonesia is hosting the Indonesia-Africa Forum in Bali from Sept 1-3. It is hoping to deepen ties with the continent in areas such as batteries and health care. (Photo by Nana Shibata)

Indonesia's ties to Africa go back decades. Former President Sukarno formed the Asian-Africa Conference, also known as the Bandung Conference, in 1955. The Jokowi administration has been looking to expand its influence on the continent and with the international community, especially since it chaired the Group of 20 economies in 2022.

Other Asian powers are also seeking to raise their profile with African countries.

Chinese President Xi Jinping will [host the China-Africa Cooperation forum](#) in Beijing on Wednesday. Trade between the two last year hit a record \$282.1 billion, and by the end of 2023, the stock of Chinese direct investment in Africa exceeded \$40 billion, according to Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian. At a news conference on Thursday, he said, "China firmly supports Africa in exploring the path of independent development," adding that Beijing prioritizes infrastructure investment there.

Vying with China, India has sought to use its growing economic clout to rally the Global South. At Nikkei's Future of Asia forum in May, [Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam](#)

[Jaishankar said](#), India's "engagement with Africa has also intensified, especially along the East African coastline."

Japan, meanwhile, has hosted the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) since 1993. Japanese direct investment into Africa reached 1.1391 trillion yen (\$7.79 billion) in 2023, rising 25% from the year before, according to data from the Japan External Trade Organization.

For Indonesia, a stronger relationship with Africa is critical as it seeks to become a nonpermanent member of the United Nations Security Council. Backing from African nations will help with its bid.

Still, some observers say Indonesia needs to put more effort into its diplomacy. "Playing that leading role requires not only determination to lead but also strong intellectual capacity and enormous material resources to sustain the diplomatic endeavors," Muhammad Habib Abiyan Dzakwan, a researcher at Jakarta-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies, told Nikkei Asia. "Unfortunately, Indonesia is yet to reach that stage, as our focus lies on the immediate region, if not only domestic concerns."

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