



## Hearing on “China’s Strategic Aims in Africa”

May 8, 2020

### Opening Statement of Vice Chairman Carolyn Bartholomew

Good morning, and welcome to the fifth hearing of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission’s 2020 Annual Report cycle. Thank you all for joining us, especially our witnesses for the time and effort they have put into their testimonies. I would also like to thank the Senate Recording Studio for livestreaming this event.

Over the past two decades, Africa has emerged as a centerpiece of China’s international strategy. Accordingly, China has significantly expanded its economic and political footprint across the continent. Regional and global initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, serve as mechanisms for Beijing to promote its development model and foreign policy agenda. Forty-four of Africa’s 54 countries have signed on to BRI, and China has emerged as the leading financier and builder of infrastructure projects across the continent. China is also rapidly building up its presence in Africa’s fast-growing digital economy, and has dominated the construction of Africa’s telecom infrastructure.

For the Chinese government, the advantages of engaging with Africa are clear. China has used its investment in Africa to gain access to the continent’s vast commodity resources, including oil, precious metals, and minerals crucial to the production of emerging technologies such as electric vehicle batteries. Africa also represents an attractive market for China’s construction firms, which face excess capacity at home and are eager to find new outlets. However, many times the benefits of these projects do not flow to the broader African workforce. China’s funding of Africa’s infrastructure projects also often comes with requirements that borrower countries select Chinese suppliers, making it more difficult for other countries, including the United States, to participate in Africa’s infrastructure projects.

Beijing has also been able to leverage its engagement in Africa into support on the international stage. For instance, China has used its presence in Africa to isolate Taiwan diplomatically: all African nations have recognized Beijing over Taipei, with the exception of Eswatini. African leaders have also expressed support for Beijing’s territorial claims in the South China Sea and made public statements in support of Beijing during the 2019 protests in Hong Kong.

The consequences for Africa are mixed. While Africa has an immense need for infrastructure that remains unmet, the projects that China funds are often selected through opaque means, exacerbating corruption problems in Africa. Moreover, China’s funding comes at a price, contributing to an unsustainable buildup of debt in many African countries. These lending practices have led to accusations of a “new colonialism,” and in the wake of the economic slowdowns caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, African countries have increasingly called for debt relief. China has so far been silent to these requests, raising the question of whether the United States and other responsible donors will be left footing the bill. While China has publicized its humanitarian public health efforts in Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic,

many Africans are skeptical, and have expressed concern that the equipment donated by China may be of poor quality.

Today our distinguished witnesses will address these important issues. I will now turn the floor over to my colleague and co-chair for this hearing, Commissioner Andreas Borgeas.