

## Africa's mining: Eritrean President

**President Afwerki envisions Eritrea's future through his trip to Seoul in 27 years**



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol (center) and First Lady Kim Keon Hee pose with Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki before a welcoming banquet in Seoul on June 3. (Yonhap)

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Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki speaks during his interview with The Korea Herald on Friday in Seoul, during his trip to attend the first Korea-Africa Summit in South Korea.

South Korea has the potential to serve as a "catalyst" in unlocking Africa's mining potential by strengthening the continent's capacity to add value to

critical resources that have remained underdeveloped, despite the intricate challenges at play, Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki said in his interview with The Korea Herald on Friday.

Afwerki sees Korea's expertise, industrial prowess and technology as beacons of hope in translating Africa's longstanding ambitions to develop its mineral sector into a tangible reality.

Afwerki pointed to the need to overcome the underlying hurdle that has hindered the sector's development: the disparity between Africa's mineral potential and its current capacity and available resources.

"It's so complex with all the potential resources and the wider gap that you have on the capabilities and the exact resources. So Korea could be a catalyst," Afwerki noted.



"Consider Korea's role to be the catalyst; all the technologies, knowledge, and expertise will come. The potential resources are there, and then development will be a mix or an equation of both coming together."

Afwerki also perceives the mineral sector as a potential source of funds that can drive the development of other industries such as agriculture, energy, fishing and infrastructure.

The mineral partnership was the centerpiece of the 2024 Korea-Africa Summit on June 4, leading to the establishment of the Korea-Africa Critical Minerals Dialogue. This landmark initiative, involving 48 African countries, highlights the increasing strategic importance of mineral resources essential for developing future industries like electric vehicles, batteries and renewable energy.

Afwerki also held a separate one-on-one meeting with President Yoon Suk Yeol the following day, during which the South Korean leader proposed deepening bilateral cooperation in the mineral sector with Eritrea, a country rich in mineral resources.

To elevate the mineral partnership between Africa and Korea, Afwerki underscored, "All sorts of industries will have to be taken stock of," emphasizing the need to comprehensively assess infrastructure, technology, equipment and human resource capacity.

Afwerki, however, candidly admitted the mineral sector is currently "one of the most challenging sectors" for South Korea and Africa to form a partnership in.

"It's a very complex thing. It's not easy; the challenges are huge. The potential is there, but just talking about the potential doesn't make sense," Afwerki said Friday during his trip to Seoul to attend the first-ever Korea-Africa summit.

Afwerki said Korea and Africa would first have to come up with "detailed plans" for mineral partnership to overcome hurdles that Africa faces.

"After we put the plans on the table, then we need to plan about mobilizing resources: human resources, financial resources, technology, machinery equipment, what have you, and then see the capacity," the president said. "The human resource capacity is very much critical to developing this mining industry. Training, vocational training, professional training, skills and experience will have to be there."

Afwerki highlighted "clear limitations in Africa" concerning the advancement of the Korea-Africa partnership as a whole, citing instability and conflicts as significant challenges faced by the continent.

Eritrea's president underscored, "Korea should assume responsibility of contributing to the partnership by understanding the reality in Africa at a sovereign level, at the regional and sub-regional level but also at the continental level."

"Unless Korea is aware of this complex challenge, it's not going to be easy to implement any program," Afwerki underscored.

Afwerki also shared insights into South Korea's development over almost three decades, noting his first visit to the country 27 years ago in 1997. At that time, he remarked, it seemed unimaginable for Korea to host a summit with African countries.

"I say the achievements in Korea are tremendous, and that's one of the most inspiring things about the partnership that has to be established between Korea and Africa. Africa can benefit a lot from the experience of Korea," Afwerki said.

Afwerki emphasized the symbolic significance of his trip to Seoul, highlighting Korea as a tangible representation of the future he envisions for Eritrea. He noted firsthand observations across various sectors, including infrastructure, energy and technology, alongside the values of stability, hard work and discipline.

"How can I be there without even imagining where I can go?" Afwerki said. "The inspiring reality of Korea is there for everyone to come and see the future here. I say the future we see in our imagination is here and real."

Afwerki defined his trip to Seoul as "It's a matter of the past, the present and the future."

To develop bilateral relations effectively, Afwerki emphasized the importance of meticulously crafting documented plans that outline the sectors of cooperation and the methods for implementation between the two countries in the long term. The plans should include specific phases and timelines.

"It's not an easy journey; it's an uphill movement," Afwerki said.

Afwerki assured Yoon that within 8 to 10 weeks, he would furnish a comprehensive document containing detailed industry information and a development plan from Eritrea. The objective is to offer the Yoon government and Korean institutions a deeper insight into Eritrea's reality and development trajectory, facilitating the formulation of a roadmap for collaborative cooperation and development initiatives.

Concerning the significance of the inaugural Korea-Africa summit, the president emphasized its role as a platform to delve into both the current state and prospects of the partnership.

"So, the significance of the summit provokes a number of ideas. And then, we need to do a lot of homework so that we can appreciate and understand where we are now and what we need to be in the future," Afwerki said. "It's not just a partnership for three, four or five years. It's a partnership for generations to come."