

Introductory Remarks – 13th Coordinating Council

Honourable Chairman of the Coordinating Council
Prof. Dr. Mohammad Hag Ali Hassan
Distinguished Members of the Council
Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of COMSATS, it is my pleasure and honour to welcome you in Trieste to participate in the 13th Coordinating Council meeting of COMSATS. I am very thankful to all of you for taking time out from your busy schedules and for traveling to Trieste to be a part of this important annual event of COMSATS. Your presence here is indeed very reassuring for COMSATS Secretariat since it shows your commitment to play a strong role in the programmes and activities of this organization. I am also grateful to our worthy chairperson, the Executive Director of TWAS, who offered to hold this meeting this year at the Headquarters of TWAS. We accepted this offer with pleasure considering it to be an honour for the COMSATS Coordinating Council.

Although it constituted a deviation from the practice of holding the meeting at one of the Centres of Excellence of COMSATS, all members of the Council welcomed the decision, which is an acknowledgement of the fact that TWAS is intimately connected with our Network and, in fact, it can be regarded as the Network's mother organization. The role of Prof. Hassan in the genesis of COMSATS is well-known. We are all very happy that he is chairing this meeting at TWAS Secretariat. I hope this occasion will bode well for COMSATS and turn out to be a lucky 13th meeting in spite of the superstition about no.13. The last meeting was chaired on his behalf by Honourable Professor Sam Ale in Abuja, Nigeria. I acknowledge with gratitude his able steering of that meeting, and the guidance he provided as an experienced member of the Council. It was personally helpful for me because that meeting was my first meeting after joining COMSATS as Executive Director.

In Abuja, in my remarks at the opening ceremony, I candidly talked about the strengths and weaknesses of COMSATS and respectfully reminded the members of both Coordinating Council and Consultative committee that it was their joint responsibility to expand the scope of our successful ventures while rectifying the short comings wherever possible.

Let me again say that the platform of COMSATS that we have under our joint control is a very unique and potent forum. This annual meeting in itself is a remarkable occasion, wherein the Heads of major R&D organizations present the programmes and achievements that they have made and share their experiences with their peers from other centers in COMSATS member countries. It is a remarkable opportunity because it provides a rare chance of one centre to understand what other centres are focusing on and why; what is it that is making their programmes successful; what activities, if any, can run into difficulties; what elements of their programmes can be emulated by others; and what inspiration can be derived from success stories. In return, this centre would come up with proposals whereby it can be of assistance to others. To my understanding, this mechanism, even at the minimum level of sharing information and learning from each other's best practices, is a process of South-South scientific cooperation of enormous value.

The founders of COMSATS must be praised for conceiving the idea of creating a network of Centres of Excellence in the South. I believe TWAS and its Executive Director were instrumental in materializing this idea. This Network remains to be the most valuable instrument at the disposal of COMSATS to achieve its mission. As custodian of this Network, the Coordinating Council members are COMSATS' most prized human resource asset.

The organization as a whole has also some distinctive features, which we can capitalize on to our collective advantage. You will find that much of the interests of the South are some how being taken care of under the stewardship of the

North. This is not necessarily bad, since organizations like UNESCO, ICTP, UNIDO and ICGEB etc. have played a tremendous role in the scientific development of the South. However, it is an implicit recognition of the fact that the South is somehow lacking in vision or capacity when left to fend for itself on its own. COMSATS is an exception; it is a forum conceptualized and materialized by a group of developing countries for preserving their interests and enhancing their mutual cooperation; not under the prodding by the North nor under the watchful eye of the well-meaning benefactors in the North but through incessant efforts of the Pakistani Noble Laureate, Prof. Dr. Abdus Salam. Prof. Salam strongly believed in the inherent intellectual strength of our nations based on historical references that he always gave in his speeches. Today, at the campus of Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics, as we meet and discuss our scientific cooperation from the platform of COMSATS, I am sure his soul will be deeply satisfied to see his brainchild moving towards maturity.

COMSATS is an organization of the South, formed by the countries of the South, for implementing development agenda of the South through Science and Technology. Of course the Developing countries do have other fora, such as COMSTECH, the Standing Committee on Science and Technology of the Organization of Islamic Conference, there is ISESCO, there is NAM S&T Centre, apart from regional South-South consortiums. But all of these set-ups are under the umbrellas of big political groupings constituting strong parent organizations. COMSATS is under no such umbrella; it is itself a parent organization. What all this means is that we, as partners of an apex organization, created through the vision of our own great leaders, with the singular purpose of empowering our societies, are responsible to make COMSATS a vehicle for progress through mutual assistance.

The will to do so is evidently there, and the intellectual capacity to do so is quite obvious, judging from the presence of the people around this table with illustrious scientific careers and with admirable personal contributions in their own scientific

organizations. We, in COMSATS Secretariat, are in your hands. The Secretariat comprises of a small dedicated group, fully committed to do its job, to the level and extent desired by the member States. It must be a matter of satisfaction for the members of the Council that the Government of Pakistan has never faltered in its support for COMSATS. Since the start of financial year in 2009 the grant of the Government of Pakistan was increased to Rs.40 M per annum (= \$0.5M). With a good operational team, a good infrastructure and a steady financial support for the secretariat coming from the host country, we are all free to concentrate on building the partnerships among us using the tools and resources in our hands. Personally, I am now feeling more confident than previous year to take up new innovative ideas for enhancing the impact and outreach of our organization. However, I will be heavily counting on the guidance and practical help that is offered from you and your institutions. COMSATS is no more and no less than the aggregate of the individual capacities of your centers. COMSATS, on its own, is not a funding agency. It can only pool the resources provided by the member States and use them for scientific capacity building, in an appropriate manner.

I have had the pleasure of visiting some of the Centres of Excellence since December last year. I take this opportunity to thank the organizers of my visits for their cordial welcome and generous hospitality extended to me in these visits. After visiting the laboratories and research facilities, I can say with confidence that there are enormous resources available within these organizations, which can be tapped to one another's advantage. I also realized, that there are limits to what we can do as working scientists, given the constraints of our economies, political systems and bureaucratic structures. Nevertheless, we can gain strength through raising our collective voice for more funding and greater support from our own Governments. By and large, the spendings on S&T in COMSATS member countries has remained well below world averages. We have to plead this case collectively and with great force by using communiqués and resolutions from

COMSATS platform. We have to find new ways of advancing the S&T sector such as the measures proposed in our strategy document sent to you earlier.

Gentleman, I am sure that you are fully conscious of the breathtaking advances in S&T taking place in the world. I would like to remind you that the world is steadily moving towards a stage where the competition for resources, as fundamental as clean air and potable water, is going to be more and more fierce. We will have to pool our abilities to preserve our interests as developing nations, in the face of tough challenges posed by the interest groups wishing to maintain the status quo. Our peoples have legitimate desire of enjoying the fruits of development and we are the people who can play a leading role to realize the wishes of teeming millions in our countries.

To the extent that we have the ability to do so, we must do our best. The key to success, in this connection is 'Cooperation', at bilateral as well as multilateral level. We must ask ourselves, why there are no projects in the South on the model of CERN and ITER. COMSATS would like to be a part of this great enterprise. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that we keep ourselves collectively engaged with one other through this forum.

What I am saying is somewhat rhetorical, but I hope it is excusable for the opening ceremony. For the next five technical sessions, you will be talking about the practicalities of our future endeavours. I wish you all very fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.