

14th Meeting of COMSATS Coordinating Council
Introductory Remarks at the Inaugural Function
by the Executive Director COMSATS
(Bogotá, Colombia, 26th May 2011)

Honourable Director, COLCIENCIAS (Colombian Administrative Department of Science, Technology and Innovation);
Director, International Centre for Physics;
Prof. Mohamed Hag Ali Hassan;
Excellencies, distinguished colleagues;
Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of COMSATS, it is my honour and pleasure to welcome you all in the inaugural session of 14th meeting of COMSATS Coordinating Council. I especially extend my warm welcome to those who have traveled long distances, mostly from other continents, to join us in Colombia. I am very grateful to the administration of 'International Centre for Physics' for organizing this meeting here in Bogotá and making excellent arrangements with the help and generous support from COLCIENCIAS. I am especially thankful to Prof. Restrepo and Prof. Posada for their personal interest in the holding of this year's Coordinating Council meeting of COMSATS in Colombia. It is indeed a very special occasion as the COMSATS Coordinating Council is meeting for the first time in the South American region since its inception 17 years ago. When CIF joined COMSATS as a Centre of Excellence in 1996, there was an offer to hold the Council meeting in Colombia, which nevertheless could not materialize. However, last year in the 13th Council meeting held in Trieste, Italy, when Prof. Posada was unanimously elected as the Chairperson of the Coordinating Council, he was kind enough to invite his colleagues to Bogotá in 2011 for the Council Meeting to mark the first year of his tenure.

It is a special honour for COMSATS to have Prof. Posada, as the Chairperson of a Council that comprises distinguished heads of prestigious R&D organizations in developing countries. COMSATS is proud to be steered by a person of the academic stature as high as that of Prof. Posada, who is highly respected for his key role in mainstreaming ST&I in Colombia.

The CIF itself was the realization of a dream by another visionary, Prof. Abdus Salam, who saw the salvation of humanity in the emergence of high-quality scientific institutions throughout the developing world. It was Salam's life-long ambition to build S&T systems that could lead to socio-economic transformation for the betterment of developing countries. COMSATS was established to facilitate this transformation. Salam was again a driving force behind the creation of COMSATS, like his other big ventures in the form of ICTP and TWAS in Trieste. It is very symbolic that Prof. Posada, the Director of CIF, has replaced Prof. M.H.A. Hassan, the former Executive Director of TWAS, as the Chairperson of COMSATS Coordinating Council. All the three entities; CIF, TWAS and COMSATS trace their genesis to the genius of Salam. It is highly appropriate that on this occasion we acknowledge the great services of Prof. Hassan for his excellent leadership of TWAS and COMSATS Coordinating Council during the periods 1985 – 2010 and 1994 – 2010, respectively. Prof. Hassan continues to remain an icon of the international movement aimed at enhancing the role of ST&I in the policies and

development plans in the South. It was a matter of honour for COMSATS to offer him a life-time honorary Membership of the Council, which he graciously accepted last year. We are glad that he was able to join us for this year's meeting.

Colombia is well on course to consolidate its ST&I system, under decree no. 585 of 1991. COLCIENCIAS is leading that effort under the able guidance of Prof. Jaime Restrepo, who established his academic credentials as a literary writer and medical professional before turning to politics. With a leader like Prof. Restrepo, there is no doubt that COLCIENCIAS will continue to achieve successes in pursuit of its Mission. We are very honoured to have him among us this morning. In Colombia, as elsewhere in the developing world, a key element of success is always the efforts made to seek international cooperation and engage in collaborative scientific activities. This cooperation can take the form of bilateral arrangements between two countries, but it is often achievable through the international fora that facilitate scientific interactivity and mobility of scientific personnel.

A number of platforms exist for this purpose within and outside UN system; on governmental and non-governmental levels, as well as on regional and international levels. All fora and all efforts, in whatever form they take place, are necessary and complementary, because the task of making ST&I an engine of growth in low- to middle-income countries is huge. As many proponents as possible are necessary and welcome to participate in this colossal task. COMSATS is proud to be a part of this historical transition process. In fact, COMSATS stands out in certain respects. First, it is a completely autonomous body without the umbrella of UN system, regional or international political forums, or even a symbolic patronage from any sources in the North. It is an organization of the countries of the South, operated by the South for the benefit of the South. Most importantly, it has presence in three continents. Its success is the collective responsibility of all Member States and should be considered as a matter of prestige, proving the point that the developing nations are confident enough to join hands voluntarily on their own and achieve progress by helping each other in building robust S&T systems in their countries. The very existence of a body like COMSATS is a tribute to the political leadership of its Member Countries, who are, in principle, the Members of the Commission, although represented through their respective focal points. I take this opportunity to call upon the Members of the Commission to:

- First of all, keep their faith that the progress of S&T in their countries will eventually change the destinies of their nations;
- Secondly, to make sure that sufficient resources are made available for this to happen; and
- Finally, to keep patronizing the forums like COMSATS to let them play their roles effectively.

Especially, to the host country of this meeting, may I most humbly submit that enhanced financial support for R&D activities, to the extent of at least 1% of GDP, would be required to strengthen its international competitiveness. Moreover, any support for COMSATS will definitely bring dividends to Colombia in excess of the original contribution made. Even the money spent by Colombia for this meeting, I am sure, will be beneficial in the sense that it would lead to Colombia's stronger networking with countries in Asia and Africa. I acknowledge Colombia's continuous patronage of COMSATS and sincerely hope that this will take a more formal shape in the years

ahead. COMSATS may be short of cash inputs, but it certainly does not lack in-kind contributions. I believe that far more significant than monetary support is the intellectual input provided by Member Countries. The highly reputed Centres of Excellence represented in this meeting are power-houses with a potential to exchange knowledge and expertise in a wide variety of disciplines in science and technology. COMSATS always relies on the distinguished Heads of these Centres to provide the Secretariat, guidance and practical help for engaging in activities that can bring tangible benefits to the members of the Network.

Clearly, COMSATS has yet to realize its full potential. There are weaknesses that we have to overcome; this is not possible without joint efforts from all of us who have come here today in a show of commitment to the cause of South-South cooperation. The organization's Secretariat is functional and performing reasonably well through a generous annual grant of the host country, Pakistan. We are using a number of innovative mechanisms for cooperative scientific activities, notably in partnership with ISESCO and UNESCO. We are also very proud of our flagship projects, COMSATS Internet Services (CIS) and COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (CIIT), both of which have presence in many cities of Pakistan. The tele-health expertise at CIS and 53 degree programmes, along with the world-class research facilities at CIIT, are available for COMSATS' member countries to benefit from. In view of its financial limitations, COMSATS has not launched mega projects in the recent years but thanks to the ingenuity of our worthy Council Members, we have launched a programme of 'Thematic Research Groups' as agreed last year. I am happy to report that three of these groups have now held their Foundation meetings. I am sure these groups would be the precursors of more ambitious future international research projects. I am also happy to announce that we have received COMSATS' Membership requests from two countries Iraq and Turkey. The efforts to expand the Network of Centres of Excellence have also been fruitful. An esteemed founder member of COMSATS, Bangladesh, has offered one of its largest and most prestigious R&D organizations, the BCSIR, to be a part of the Network. Formalities of the new Members of COMSATS and new member of Network are underway. We assure you that COMSATS' administration is committed to stick to its primary objective of scientific capacity-building through mutual cooperation of the Member Countries. A small but dedicated team of workers in the Secretariat is always ready to implement Council's directives in this regard.

In the end, I would again like to say how pleased I am to be in Colombia – the home-country of the Chairman of Coordinating Council. I express my profound thanks to the Council Members for sparing time to participate in the deliberations of the Council meeting. My special thanks are due to all colleagues in CIF, COLCIENCIAS and COMSATS Headquarters, who have worked hard to prepare documentation, make logistic arrangements and undertake a number of other actions, in order to make this meeting successful.

Thank You.