

14th Meeting of COMSATS Coordinating Council
Welcome Address at the Inaugural Function
by Dr. Eduardo Posada
Chairman COMSATS Coordinating Council
(Bogotá, Colombia, 26th May 2011)

Dr. Jaime Restrepo, General Director of COLCIENCIAS;
Dr. Imtinan Elahi Qureshi - Executive Director of COMSATS;
Excellencies, distinguished colleagues;
Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of Colombia and the Centro Internacional de Física (CIF), it is my pleasure to welcome you in the opening session of 14th meeting of COMSATS Coordinating Council, the first one to be held in Latin America. I particularly wish to thank Dr. Qureshi and Mr. Hussain for their perseverance, interest and confidence in CIF's local team; the organization of this important event in Colombia is a fundamental step in the establishment of prosperous and fruitful links between the three continents being represented at this meeting. I am particularly grateful to those that have traveled for many hours and even days with the purpose of joining us today.

I also want to thank Dr. Jaime Restrepo, Director of COLCIENCIAS, for his participation in this inaugural session. Colombia is establishing new policies for science and technology that will favour international cooperation with emphasis on South-South initiatives.

We are also extremely honoured to have amongst us this morning Prof. Mohamed Hassan, whose contribution to the development of science in the third world as Executive Director of TWAS and Chairman of COMSATS Coordinating Council have been invaluable. It is a great honour for me to have been elected as the Chairperson of the Coordinating Council to replace such an exceptional person. Fortunately, he has accepted to keep helping us as an honorary member of the Council.

CIF was established 25 years ago following the model of ICTP that, as we all know, was founded by the outstanding figure of Prof. Abdus Salam, who also played an essential role in the birth of TWAS and COMSATS. During all these years, we have carried out training and research activities, with emphasis on contributing to finding the solution of specific problems of the Andean and Caribbean regions but always bearing in mind the necessity of extending the international cooperation to other countries of the South. When CIF joined COMSATS as a Centre of Excellence in 1996, this was an excellent opportunity for the same purpose. Unfortunately, only in the last few years we have been able to participate actively in the activities of the Commission, but I am sure that our contribution will be a lot more permanent in the near future.

In particular, one of our contributions must be to increase the number of Latin-American institutions for their involvement in COMSATS' programmes. We already have the very important participation of Brazil and Jamaica.

Additionally, we must focus on the purpose of inviting Argentina, Chile and Mexico to become a part of COMSATS, considering their increasing economic importance and their strong scientific tradition.

Despite the geographic distances, which are no longer a major obstacle due to access to Internet, our countries have many things in common and, in particular, similar levels of economic development. Our main assets are our people, cultural and biological diversity, and also our complementary differences. This means that we have specific needs particular to the South that demand an alternative approach to development. Certainly, this approximation implies constructing our own models, defining our interests, and determining the road to progress. In this process, COMSATS can play an essential role through the three main strategic programmes that we are developing in natural products, climate change and information technologies. It is clear that one of our purposes must be to promote a more active participation of all member institutions in these important initiatives.

In addition to these programmes, there are some other initiatives that COMSATS can undertake successfully, taking into account the influence that it has in developing countries as an international, independent institution. Among others, we can suggest the following:

- Development of political actions aimed at increasing the investment in science, technology and innovation (ST&I). One per cent of GNP for S&T should be a minimum common goal.
- Establishment of flexible and efficient mechanisms for the administration of S&T resources. One of the main obstacles for research and industrial development in our countries are the complex procedures required for contracting, purchasing, importing goods or creating new companies, and the inefficient and complex control-systems.
- Promotion of a strong cooperation between universities and research centres with the production sector. One of the most critical aspects in developing countries is how to establish a connection between science and the production sector. We all know that our institutions are producing science and technology of a very high level; however, only in very few cases this production generates solutions or products of a high social or economic impact. Traditionally, our governments and our industry buy most of the soft and hard technologies, ignoring locally generated solutions that are often much better adapted to local conditions.
- In connection with the previous point, we must urgently promote modernization of the existing production sector, based essentially on the locally generated or adapted technology and, even more importantly, we must establish the conditions to stimulate the creation of new industries of a much higher technological level of excellence.

Our centres can play an enormous role for the aspect mentioned lastly, by showing successful examples of spin-offs and cooperation with industry.

In this path of thought and actions, I want to recall some tools that, from our experience, have been very useful:

1. People are our most precious and valuable good and it is clear that we all have an enormous capital of young, talented people that can deeply change our future if they are given the opportunity.
2. Research and development needs are defined in the field, based on diagnosis of problems, not on symptoms.
3. Construction of sustainable solutions involves inter-disciplinary work, using local resources – human, biological and physical – and international experiences, especially from countries of similar levels of development.
4. We should be able to innovate in the creation of models of sustainable development and generate products that meet international market-requirements in the framework of environmental consciousness and responsibility.

This meeting is a wonderful opportunity to collectively address the challenge of constructing roads to progress, advancement and maturity, in an increasingly complex world. We can achieve this through establishment of mutual agreements, coalitions, programmes and projects that demand of us to unite efforts and strengths in the development of ideas, products and solutions for the benefit of our people.

I am certain that this meeting will strengthen the bonds between our institutions for the benefit of our scientists, our institutions, our countries and finally for the planet.

I wish to express to you my deepest thanks for your presence here today, and wish you all a pleasant and fruitful stay in Colombia.