

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR COMSATS

**(15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of COMSATS Coordinating Council, TÜBİTAK Marmara Research Center (MAM), 24 – 25 May 2012, Gebze Kocaeli, Turkey)**

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- Honourable Advisor to the President TÜBİTAK, Dr. Çağatay Telli
- Acting President TÜBİTAK Marmara Research Centre, Dr. Ibrahim Dinçer
- Chairman Coordinating Council, Prof. Eduardo Posada
- Distinguished Members of the Coordinating Council
- Excellencies
- Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome all of you in this inaugural session of the 15<sup>th</sup> COMSATS Coordinating Council meeting being held in TÜSSİDE, the Turkish Institute for Industrial Management, at a location close to the historical city of Istanbul. The meeting is being hosted by Marmara Research Centre, the Centre of Excellence of COMSATS, which is a very prestigious institution of the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey, the TÜBİTAK. On behalf of COMSATS, I thank the organizers for making excellent arrangements for the meeting. My special thanks are due to the members of the Council who have travelled long distances to come here and share their scientific achievements with their colleagues, with a view to promote South-South cooperation. To learn about each others' activities in the spirit of openness and the willingness to extend help, where required, is the hallmark of such meetings.

My colleagues from COMSATS Secretariat in Islamabad and myself have come here barely one month after a historic event, from the perspective of COMSATS, where the Commission Members sent their representatives to hold the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commission meeting on 16 – 17 April 2012 in Islamabad. It may be recalled that the Commission comprises of Heads of State/Government, who may nominate Ministers or other high-level officials to represent them in the Commission meeting. The meeting of this high-level forum was long overdue. But I am glad to report that it was eventually held last month in a most befitting manner. On personal invitation of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, there were 50 participants from 17 countries, out of a total COMSATS Membership of 21, who attended the meeting. Moreover, there were three International

organizations COMSTECH, ISESCO and TWAS which were represented through high-level officials, as observers.

We were able to achieve a number of objectives on that occasion, which included:

- i. The re-affirmation of the commitment of Member States to actively engage in the programmes and activities of COMSATS.
- ii. Pledges for financial support in terms of Annual Membership Contributions.
- iii. Establishment of a COMSATS Endowment Fund of US \$10 M.
- iv. Appreciation of COMSATS capacity building programmes over the last seventeen years and endorsement of COMSATS efforts to formulate its future 5-year strategy.
- v. Recognition of the role played by COMSATS Coordinating Council in the fulfilment of COMSATS objective of facilitating South-South cooperation.
- vi. Essential amendments in the 1994 Agreement to Establish COMSATS.
- vii. Election of Ghana as the new Chair of COMSATS for a period of three years.
- viii. Adoption of a joint Resolution.

The Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of Pakistan, as the official host of the meeting had put into place immaculate arrangements for extending excellent hospitality and security to all delegates. The commitment of the Government of Pakistan to continue the hosting of COMSATS Secretariat in Pakistan and its offer of full support for the execution of COMSATS' functions was reiterated by the Minister for Science and Technology, as well as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. It was noted with high degree of appreciation that the Prime Minister chaired the inaugural session of the meeting and also joined the delegates during the Dinner. His speeches on both occasions reflected the admiration for the work of COMSATS and a commitment to support its future activities.

In my speech, I impressed upon the distinguished delegates that the ownership of COMSATS belongs to them and they should use this instrument to enhance their S&T capacity through collaborative activities, for which excellent infrastructure is provided by COMSATS Secretariat. The fact that the recurring administrative and establishment expenditures of the secretariat are fully borne by the host country, Pakistan, means that the Member Countries can derive optimum benefits from their financial contributions meant for the execution of scientific programmes. I am glad to say that there were a few very generous offers of funding for the activities of COMSATS by different countries.

The real strength of COMSATS, of course, lies here in this forum of the Coordinating Council. The intellectual input that is provided by the Member Countries and some non-member countries through interactions in the Council meetings is, in fact, worth more than any monetary contribution. There are other, in-kind mechanisms, in which Member Countries have been contributing towards financial liabilities of COMSATS. To bear the expenses of holding Council meetings and to provide local hospitality to the participants of International Workshops and conferences co-organized by COMSATS, involve large funds, which are generously provided by the host countries.

Recognizing the pivotal role that this Council has in the affairs of COMSATS, let me say that we have to do more to meet the expectations of our Member Countries. There are a number of innovative ways in which collaborations can be developed without necessarily depending on the lean budget of COMSATS. The COMSATS Centres of Excellence are highly reputed R&D establishments in their national capacity. It should be within their means to allocate some funds for imparting training to scientific workers or hosting collaborators from the Member Countries. Any exchange of knowledge within the developing countries would contribute to their collective strength. It is to be well understood that raising the standards of livings of a vast segment of deprived humanity residing in the Countries of the South, would require enormous political as well as technological skills. The key to success in this effort would be a strategy of close cooperation, involving sharing of know-how and best practices.

The COMSATS Secretariat, on its part, uses the mechanism of partnership with other IGOs, principally ISESCO and UNESCO, for capacity-building activities to share costs and deliver maximum benefits to the scientific communities of COMSATS countries. In the last three years 40 such activities were successfully organized. With the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World (TWAS), we are currently undertaking a project, whereby the profiles of the COMSATS Centres of Excellence in the form of small booklets will be published jointly by TWAS and COMSATS. The profile of one of the Centres of Excellence in Pakistan, ICCBS, has been published already. The purpose of this exercise is to publicize the achievements of the Centres with a view to foster future collaborations and also to attract the attention of donor agencies. During my meeting with TWAS Executive Director, Dr. Romain Murenzi earlier this year, I took up a number of other proposals in which COMSATS and TWAS can join hands for the benefit of common Member Countries. I had also held meetings in the European

Laboratory for Particle Physics, CERN, in Geneva, where the role of COMSATS to make use of CERN facilities for the purpose of training and education in relevant fields of Physics was discussed. In Pakistan, COMSATS played a significant role in formulating National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy. Based on the analysis of policies by other countries, consideration of sectoral policies relevant to S&T system, and taking on-board all stake-holders, a comprehensive document was prepared. In this exercise, we were acutely conscious of the social, financial and infrastructural limitations for rapid expansion of S&T sector. Assuming the political will to harness S&T resources for the economic development of the country, a comprehensive action list was devised, so that any action that turns out to be feasible or is judged as urgent is taken, using the resources at hand at a given time. Significant attention was given in the policy document to cultivate and seriously pursue bilateral technical agreements with other developing countries, and making use of all possible fora, especially COMSATS, to enhance multilateral scientific cooperation. The experience gained in this exercise could be useful for any other country in a similar situation as that of Pakistan. The flagship projects of COMSATS in Pakistan were meant to replicate the experience in other countries. The COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, which is a public-sector degree awarding Institution, had phenomenal success since its inception 12 years ago. It is now among the top ten universities of Pakistan, according to the ranking of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. The COMSATS University is open for admission to graduate students from all member countries. More importantly, the University administration is ready to share its successful experience of starting new interdisciplinary departments and research projects with interested educational institutions in other developing countries. Similarly, the enormous experience gained by COMSATS, through its Internet Services and e-Health programmes can be emulated by other countries. CIS administration is ready to undertake relevant projects in Member Countries if requests to this effect are sent by the interested parties.

COMSATS is proud to have the partnership of MAM as a member of the Network. This is one of the major Centres under TÜBİTAK. The TÜBİTAK itself is a prime example of a coherent approach at national level, towards the development of S&T policy, providing funds to undertake necessary research work and the diffusion of knowledge from Research Centres to Industries. The experience of TÜBİTAK as an organization and its various international cooperation programmes constitute a rich resource, which COMSATS Member Countries can benefit from. Turkey as a whole is indeed a significantly advanced member of the community of developing nations. With a

GDP of close to \$800 B and an impressive growth rate of 4 – 8% maintained for several years, Turkey can serve as a role model for other countries to steer their economies towards industrial production. Turkey is in a very good position to play a leadership role in the development of the South countries. Therefore, we strongly believe that Turkey's Membership of COMSATS will provide it yet another forum where the Country can play its due international role. In turn, it would enhance Turkey's influence and economic relations with the developing world. Like its geographic position of a bridge between Europe and Asia, Turkey can serve as a bridge for North-South collaboration in Science and Technology also. With its strong ties with European Union and Membership of Nato, Turkey is an ideal place to implement major initiatives, where the scientists from the North and the South can find a common platform for mutual interaction.

COMSATS is a body, which is full of possibilities for new initiatives and is ever ready to help in implementing plans that any country may have, in line with the organization's core objectives. In the end what COMSATS can and cannot do, depends on how the member countries want this organization to grow and what role it is assigned to play. So far as the small team of dedicated workers at COMSATS Secretariat is concerned, I assure you that they are competent and fully devoted to ensure that COMSATS serves the high purpose for which it was established seventeen years ago.

In the end, I would like to express again my deep gratitude to the TÜBİTAK and TÜBİTAK MAM for hosting this meeting and sincerely hope that the nice and quite setting of Gebze would be very conducive for interactions among members of the Council. I am sure, the meeting will smoothly undertake its deliberations and successfully achieve the targets set forth in the agenda.

Thank you for your attention.