

**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY DR. IMTINAN ELAHI QURESHI
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Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning,

On behalf of COMSATS, it is my privilege and honour to welcome you all in this inaugural session of the COMSATS Consultative Committee and Coordinating Council meetings. The delegates of the two meetings have travelled long distances and gathered here in Accra on the invitation of the COMSATS and the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), which is holding these meetings with the support of Ghana's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). I thank all delegates for their cooperation and commitment to support COMSATS activities. I thank also the senior officials of CSIR and diplomatic community in Accra for kindly sparing time to join us this morning.

It is highly appreciable that MESTI and CSIR, Ghana, offered to jointly organize the two meetings of COMSATS in tandem. The first meeting, which will start soon after this ceremony, is the meeting of COMSATS Consultative Committee. The participants of this meeting are the representatives of the Governments of COMSATS Member States, usually high officials of the Science and Technology Ministries. While the second meeting, designated as Coordinating Council meeting, which will be held on the following two days will be attended by the Heads of R&D organizations affiliated with COMSATS as its Centres of Excellence. While the Council meeting is an event, which is held regularly on annual basis in different countries, the Consultative Committee meets after 2 – 3 years.

In the present case, the objective of having the two meetings together in Accra is three-fold. Firstly, it will provide an opportunity to delegates to exchange ideas and understand the view-point from the perspective of working scientists and the managers of scientific affairs. Usually, the latter have greater administrative powers to take

decisions and allocate necessary funds, while the first group has the expertise to spell out specific requirements for R&D and also to implement relevant programmes. Even with a common well-defined objective; namely, to achieve progress in different areas of Science and Technology, the approaches of the two groups may be different. It is always helpful to engage in dialogue at national level, but also in a multilateral setting such as the one provided by COMSATS to explore possibilities of increased efficiency and optimal utilization of available resources. Secondly, the special status of Ghana as the Chair of COMSATS since April 2012 warranted a get-together of all COMSATS stakeholders here in the capital city of Ghana, to extend solidarity with the new leadership of COMSATS. The previous Chairperson, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, used to chair special meetings of COMSATS and we are looking forward to having such an opportunity with the President of Ghana also. And thirdly, from purely logistics points of view it is relatively much economical to have two different meetings at one time rather than organizing them separately. Availing the opportunity of co-location, some of the Council Members have been designated by their respective Governments to represent their Countries in Consultative Committee also, thereby reducing the cost of participation.

The purpose of this whole exercise is none other than fostering S&T cooperation among Member States. Fortunately, even in the developing countries, the political leadership is fully aware of how technology can change lives and lead to prosperity of nations. If it were not for constraints that exist because of internal socio-political situation or external conditions, most leaders would spend national resources on acquiring advanced technologies – the technologies that generate wealth, ensure good quality of life and strengthen defence capabilities. Therefore the question is not why but how S&T resources should be harnessed for national uplift.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is unfortunate that the hope of bridging gap between the developed and developing nations with respect to their S&T capacity remains largely unfulfilled. The opportunities of leapfrogging in the domain of technologies, such as Communication Technology, Biotechnology, Nanotechnology and Renewable Energy Technology, obviously exists, but it is apparently unachievable because of the break-neck speed at which new advances are being made and the resources that are required to catch up with the front runners, like USA, Germany, Japan, and Korea. China is a notable exception within the group of developing countries. It is very significant that, for the first time, the number of patents registered by China for the use of a newly discovered material, called Graphene, are more than any other country of the world.

Clearly, the remedy lies in mutual cooperation among countries which find themselves in, more or less, the same stage of S&T development. Fortunately most of these countries have huge young manpower and enormous natural resources. These advantages can be translated into economic strength, provided there is a strong will to break the shackles of dependence on industrialized countries. The recipe for real liberation is to join hands, share expertise, exchange know-how and learn from the best practices of each other. Even the richest countries are sometimes unable to execute R&D programmes that require huge financial resources. Thus we see that S&T projects such as CERN, International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, ICTP, European Synchrotron Radiation Facility, European Space Agency, European Molecular Biology Laboratory, to name a few, are undertaken with the participation of groups of countries. The idea of gaining socio-political strength through united actions by groups of nations is not new to Ghana. In fact, Ghana was the birthplace of the intellectual movement that led to the creation of Organization of African Unity (now, African Union (AU)) under your great leader Kwame Nkrumah. The AU's vision of progress through institutional arrangements such as "New Partnership for African Development" (NEPAD) is consistent with COMSATS' mission. Now that the Chair of COMSATS is with Ghana, I expect that a closer partnership between COMSATS and NEPAD will be developed leading to enhanced S&T cooperation within AU and between AU and other developing countries in Asia and Latin America.

I am very glad to report that COMSATS is making steady progress to enhance its international role. The Membership of the Commission, as well as the Membership of the Network of Centres of Excellence is increasing, the capacity building programmes are on the rise and financial sponsorship from Member States is considerably improved. One of the major recent developments has been the organization of Commission's meeting at the Ministerial-level representatives of Heads of State/Government of member countries in Islamabad in April 2012. The meeting led to several positive outcomes, e.g.

- 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. Election of Ghana as the new Chair of COMSATS for a period of three years.

As I publicize everywhere, and I will repeat here, is that COMSATS is an excellent platform for any S&T-related cooperative action desired by Member States, because of its very unique features. It is the only organization set up by the developing countries on their own, which has a Network of 18 affiliated Centres of Excellence including the flagship project in the form of COMSATS University that offers 73 degree programmes. The human resources and infrastructure available in these Centres constitute an unparalleled asset. Another unique aspect of COMSATS is that it is a purely voluntary organization, totally focussed on S&T and fully funded by the host Government of Pakistan, to the extent of administrative expenses. The fact that there is no umbrella political organization and no control by any institution within UN system, means that COMSATS Members have complete liberty to choose their priorities and have the flexibility to focus on any area of interest, within the broad spectrum of S&T fields. This situation is strength, but can also become a weakness unless Member Countries engage with the organization, both on intellectual level and financial level, for the promotion of their national interests.

For the record, I would like to mention that intensive deliberations taken during the course of past few years have lead to the adoption of COMSATS five-year strategy up to year 2016. The major component of this strategy is to expand COMSATS role by setting up International Research Groups on thematic areas of most relevance to socio-economic development. Three such groups are already in operation, covering areas of environment, ICT and herbal medicine, and a few more would come into existence in coming years. It is my earnest desire that all COMSATS countries at some stage would embark upon a mega science project that would underscore the prowess of the South. I assure you that a very dedicated and qualified team at COMSATS Secretariat in Islamabad is fully devoted to serve Member States. I invite you to please visit our website and send us your comments and suggestions for the greater effectiveness of your organization.

In the end, let me express my profound thanks to all officials of MESTI who have spent time and effort under the directions of the honourable Minister, to make this event possible. The organizing committee members who worked hard under the supervision of Director General CSIR, Dr. A. B. Salifu, and my own team at COMSATS who have diligently made pre-event preparations deserve strong appreciation and sincere thanks from COMSATS and MESTI. I am very pleased to acknowledge with extreme gratitude, the hospitality offered by the Government of Ghana to all delegates and making excellent arrangements for the meetings. I sincerely hope that the three days of intensive consultations and exchange of information during the course of COMSATS meetings will lead to tangible progress on S&T cooperation among Member States.

I thank you for your attention.