

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

by

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(17th Meeting of COMSATS Coordinating Council, Tehran, 19-20 May, 2014)

Honorable Acting Minister for International Cooperation, Govt. of Islamic Republic of Iran, H.E. Dr. Hussain Salar Amoli

President IROST, Prof. Dr. Ahmad Akbari,

Chairman COMSATS Coordinating Council, Prof. Dr. Eduardo Posada

Distinguished Members of Academic and Diplomatic Communities

Honorable Delegates

Ladies and Gentleman

Good Morning.

On behalf of COMSATS, it is my honour and pleasure to welcome you all in this inaugural session of the 17th meeting of COMSATS' Coordinating Council. The delegates of the meeting comprise of:

Council Members and accompanying officials;

Observers from international organizations, UNESCO, ISESCO & TWAS;

Technical Advisory Committee Members; and

Officials of COMSATS HQrs. in Islamabad.

They have all travelled from far and wide to be present here this morning in the beautiful and historical city of Tehran. I thank them for their commitment to the work of COMSATS Coordinating Council. I am also thankful to local participants from IROST, other Iranian R&D organizations, Universities, Government departments and diplomatic missions who are present here among us in large numbers, which is indicative of their interest in COMSATS programmes. Most importantly, I express my deep gratitude to the honorable Minister, who has been kind enough to spare time from his busy schedule to personally inaugurate this event. His presence here is indeed a source of encouragement for us and expression of support to COMSATS by the Government of Islamic Republic of Iran.

In recent year, we have witnessed steady progress in the higher education and S&T Sectors in Iran, in spite of international sanctions and denial of access to scientific and technological resources. Today, Iran continues to be a vibrant society full of cultural and technical creativity, as it has been for the last six thousand years. It is the land of literary giants such Rumi, Saadi, Hafiz, Omar Khayaam, and Firdousi; it is the land that produced mathematicians, astronomers, physicians and philosophers who left their

indelible print on mankind's journey towards modern civilization. The unparalleled scientific and technical contribution of Al-Biruni, Ibn-e-Sina, Al-Khwarizmi, among scores of other intellectual icons of their times, is a clear proof that knowledge is a common heritage of mankind.

On economic front also we see a prosperous future of Iran in view of its vast natural resources and the resourcefulness of its young dynamic population. For COMSATS, the patronage of the Govt. of Iran has a very special significance. I call upon the worthy Minister to assist IROST in playing a leadership role in the programmes and activities of COMSATS.

Ladies and Gentleman,

COMSATS' vision is to create a world where all nations are at peace with each other and capable of providing a good quality of life to their populations in a sustainable way. Science and Technology offers the most effective tools to realize this vision. As we all know, the huge inequalities of economic and social development in the world is a source of potential threat to peace. The equality and prosperity go hand-in-hand to ensure mutual respect among countries big or small. S&T plays a dual role in this respect. First of all, it highlights the commonalities among people all over the world in so far as their ability and desire to understand the nature is concerned. Scientists working on similar problems in a particular discipline of science feel affinity and comradeship irrespective of their political affiliations or cultural backgrounds. Historically, we know that the scientists working at CERN belonging to Soviet and American blocks, during the height of the cold war were practically oblivious of the diplomatic posturing of their countries. They provided a useful means of communication across the so-called 'iron curtain'.

Similarly the strong participation of Middle Eastern countries, including Iran, in the SESAME project in Jordan, in spite of the existing political environment is an opportunity to find common ground through shared objective of exploring nature. Another dimension of S&T is its ability to create equalizing conditions in terms of opportunities for progress. The world-wide-web is an equalizer of information access, whereby same knowledge resources are available to people in both developed and developing countries. It also enables people across the world to have a voice in the matters of their interests.

Moreover, the developing countries can take benefit from unique opportunities of leap-frogging offered by emerging technologies. One of the examples is the nanotechnology, in which concerted R&D efforts can provide an edge to a developing country. Thus, we see that in nano-science publications three developing countries; China, India and Iran,

occupy respectively 1st, 3rd and 8th position, leaving behind a number of developed countries such as UK, Italy, Canada and Australia.

However, the competitiveness of a large number of other developing countries in this area has not been impressive. That brings us to the question of increasing disparities within the developing countries apart from the general capacity gap of Science and Technology between the North and South. It is this emerging scenario that can be handled best by the international organizations such as COMSATS.

A quick analysis of the factors responsible for countries to be successful in their development plans leads to the following general prescription:

- (i) investment in human resources in terms of general education and especially, science education;
- (ii) formulation of effective policies and State-level patronage of initiatives aimed at building S&T capacity in specific sectors;
- (iii) allocation of sufficient resources to create necessary environment and infrastructure for productive R&D engagements.

These basic requirements when supplemented by a drive towards international interactivity and scientific cooperation definitely lead to substantial economic dividends.

I am glad to say that COMSATS is fully geared towards helping Members States to achieve these objectives. The founding countries of COMSATS, including Islamic Republic of Iran, were convinced that S&T development is the most reliable path to economic progress and they were also sure that this path can be traversed more productively if the developing countries join hands and support each other in their individual national endeavors.

COMSATS, therefore, embarked upon a journey, now in its 20th year, with the help of its member countries and partner organizations in pursuit of its mission, namely:

- (i) to undertake advocacy for prioritization of S&T development as a central pillar of socio-economic progress;
- (ii) to conduct S&T capacity building events in Members States, of which more than 180 have been held in the form of workshops, hands-on trainings and topical symposia;
- (iii) to create educational facilities for harnessing the potential of the youth in Member States, such as, the successful establishment of a University in Pakistan, the COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, offering 86 degree programmes to more than 28000 students from Pakistan and abroad;

- (iv) to undertake thematic research on topics of vital interest to developing countries, through a programme of International Thematic Research Groups, three of which are in operation involving multi-national teams of scientists from different developing countries;
- (v) to provide consultancy to Member Countries in the fields of science education, science policy and technology parks;
- (vi) to create enabling conditions for the Countries of the South to cooperate with each other in S&T areas of their common interests.

Ladies and Gentleman,

It is this last item, which is most relevant to the work of COMSATS Coordinating Council. The meeting of the Council is one of the best mechanisms of South-South Cooperation available through the platform of COMSATS. The mechanism involves the annual gathering of high-profile scientists, who have been entrusted to Head R&D organizations in their respective countries, but are connected to COMSATS in a Network of Centres of Excellence.

For the 17th Meeting of the Coordinating Council, we are honored to have with us the Heads of 13 organizations from different countries spread across four continents. The real-time exchange of information, and feed-back from their peers, is obviously a most direct and effective method to learn about each other's research programmes and available facilities. IROST is a distinguished Member of this Network. It is a Centre, which is capable of absorbing new technologies, adapting to ever-changing thrust areas of science and has capacity to offer assistance to other countries in areas in which high level of expertise has been achieved by its scientists. The present meeting organized by IROST is also a unique opportunity for this Centre of Excellence to show-case its strengths and seek partnerships, where needed.

I am thankful to all colleagues in IROST, especially our two very distinguished friends, Prof. Dr. Ahmed Akbari, President IROST, and Dr. Mahmood Molanejad, Director International Cooperation IROST; who have helped COMSATS to build strong relations with IROST. The local organizing committee must have worked very hard to organize an event involving distinguished senior scientists coming to Tehran from different parts of the world. I thank all those involved in the administration, here in IROST for their sincere efforts and in COMSATS HQrs., where a small team has worked hard to provide the delegates with maximum assistance, information, and necessary documentation for a successful Council Meeting.

I am positive that this meeting will be exceptionally successful in consolidating COMSATS international activities and generating new opportunities of S&T cooperation among Member Countries.

In the end I would like to thank once again the Honorable Minister and the Govt. of Islamic Republic of Iran for their solidarity with COMSATS and kind hospitality extended to the delegates of the Meeting.

I hope the delegates will have productive engagements during the proceedings of the meeting and also find time to enjoy the rich cultural tapestry of life in Tehran.

I thank you for your attention.