

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

*by*

**DR. IMTINAN ELAHI QURESHI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR COMSATS**

(18<sup>th</sup> Meeting of COMSATS Coordinating Council

Colombo, Sri Lanka, 12-13 May 2015)

---

Honorable Minister for Higher Education & Research, Government of Sri Lanka, H. E. Dr. Sarath Amunugama,  
Honorable Deputy Minister for Higher Education & Research, Government of Sri Lanka, H. E. Dr. Sudarshini Fernandopulle,  
Mr. P. Ranepura, Secretary, Ministry of Higher Education & Research, Government of Sri Lanka,  
Ms. Chitranganee Wagiswara, Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka,  
Chairman Industrial Technology Institute, Mr. Niroshana Perera,  
Chairman COMSATS Coordinating Council, Prof. Dr. Eduardo Posada,  
Honorable Delegates of COMSATS Coordinating Council,  
Distinguished members of academic and diplomatic community,  
ITI scientists and technicians,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

It is my pleasure and honor to welcome you all in the inaugural function of the 18<sup>th</sup> Coordinating Council meeting of COMSATS, which is being held in Colombo, the vibrant capital city of Sri Lanka. This two-day meeting, starting today, will be attended by the Council Members who are the esteemed Heads or nominees of R&D organizations in the developing countries, spread across four continents. These organizations constitute the COMSATS' Network of nineteen International Centres of Excellence. In this meeting, we have the pleasure of having representations from 13 affiliated Centres and a prestigious university of Kazakhstan, the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, which is an applicant for joining the Network as its 20<sup>th</sup> Member. Apart from the Members of the Council, we invite representatives of international partner organizations to attend the Council meeting as Observers. I am glad to note that representatives of UNESCO and TWAS are present with us today. A group of reputed scientists from both developed and developing countries is also associated with COMSATS as Members of its Technical Advisory Committee. On special request, some of the TAC Members kindly attend the meeting as invited participants. It is indeed an honor that two of the TAC Members have joined us for the 18<sup>th</sup> Meeting. A unique honor is reserved for one special personality, Prof. Dr. M. H. A. Hassan, former Executive Director of the World Academy of Sciences, who is a life-time honorary Member of the Council. He too has honored us with his participation in the present meeting. I am pleased to see in this inaugural session a good representation of ITI personnel, scientists and academics from other R&D organizations and universities in Colombo, diplomats, and representatives of the Ministry of Technology and Research. I thank all of you for being with us this morning. I am particularly grateful for the presence of His

Excellency Dr. Sarath Amunugama, who has kindly spared time to inaugurate the COMSATS meeting in Colombo. His presence is indeed, a reflection of Sri Lankan Government's Policy of encouraging international cooperation especially in the field of Science and Technology. I also consider it an affirmation of the commitment of Sri Lankan Government to support COMSATS in its laudable mission of promoting South-South cooperation in key disciplines of modern science, for the purpose of rapid socio-economic development, which is a priority for developing countries including the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Unfortunately, the road to socio-economic development has been very bumpy for much of the developing world. In spite of well-known statistics showing direct correlation between S&T capacity and economic performance, it continues to be a challenge to create credible R&D infrastructure which can lead to industrial competitiveness in world markets, in the case of most of the developing countries. There are, of course, exceptions such as China, which prefers to be regarded as a part of the international community categorized as the 'South'; yet, it has achieved remarkable success as an industrial power-house of the world. Most other countries of the South are still struggling. The stalemate, or partial progress, has been variously attributed to resource constraints, policy deficit or lack of political will. Some also believe that the shift in global balance of power, which will undoubtedly occur if 80% of the world population that resides in developing countries becomes real owners of their policies and resources, is being resisted actively by the beneficiaries of status-quo. Whatever is the reason, two conclusions are obvious:

- (i) If a nation has the visionary leadership that can mobilize its human and natural resources, all impediments can be surmounted.
- (ii) The achievement of desired goals with respect to socio-economic development can be realized best through unity and mutual cooperation within the group of countries that are low on the scale of Human Development Index. This index, which quantifies the quality of life of individuals in different countries, co-developed by a Pakistani economist, Dr. Mahbub ul Haq, is a good indicator of real development that is reflected in the living conditions of the masses, such as life expectancy, education and access to basic amenities. Out of 187 countries listed in UNDP's Human Development Report, issued in July 2014, the performance of 21 COMSATS' Member States, with respect to this index, is as follows:
  - There is no COMSATS country in the group of 49 countries that fall in the category of Very High Human Development Index (with values higher than 0.808);
  - Only seven countries fall within the index range of 0.7 – 0.79, which is considered as High HDI (These countries are Kazakhstan, China, Iran, Jordan, Jamaica, Colombia, and Sri Lanka, which is on top of the list in this category).

- Unfortunately, the rest of 14 countries in COMSATS club have either medium or low HDI, which means that the human developments conditions are far from satisfactory.

Regretfully many COMSATS Countries have also been at the epicenter of the bloodiest conflicts of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The host country of COMSATS has weathered and is continuing to tackle the consequences of invasions by foreign powers in its neighborhood. The countries in the Middle East, which were leaders of scholarship and civilization before European Renaissance, are facing unprecedented civil wars with death and destruction all around. COMSATS countries in Africa are still at the mercy of former colonial powers acting through multinational companies and asymmetric trade agreements. One COMSATS country is victim of a conspiracy to stem its progress through unjustified sanctions. The host country of this meeting has also bled profusely during a quarter century of insurgency.

In this dismal scenario, our forte is the young manpower constituting a major fraction of our populations, to whom we are duty bound to provide an enabling environment, so that they can express their innate talent and secure a better future for them.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Let me say that the remedy of all the present woes and prospects for a brighter future hinge only on two factors:

- (i) At national level, a commitment to allocate resources for education and scientific capacity building.
- (ii) At international level, a strong policy of scientific cooperation on bilateral and multilateral basis.

For the second part, there are many platforms. One of these is COMSATS. Any investment on utilizing this platform will never go wasted. It is an organization with such unique features an affiliated University, the COMSATS Institute of Information Technology and an affiliated Network of renowned educational and research Institutions.

The COMSATS' Council meeting, which is held every year with great regularity and is attended by Heads of Network Members, in itself, is a prime example of scientist-to-scientist contacts among developing countries in different regions of the world. The major part of the agenda of this meeting comprises presentations made by Council Members, outlining the yearly progress of their R&D organizations. The exchange of information about ongoing projects, achievements made, difficulties encountered, useful tips for others, and requests of support if needed; these are precisely the requirements of South-South cooperation. It is, therefore, not surprising that often during the course of the meeting, bilateral MoUs are signed for scientific cooperation on specific issues of mutual interest.

Moreover, when this elite group of scientific leaders coming from across the world, visits the laboratories of the country that is hosting the Council meeting, they learn about the status of research and quality of work being undertaken, opening the doors of future collaborative activities. For the host institution of the present meeting, Industrial Technology Institute of Sri Lanka, it is an excellent opportunity to show-case its strengths in biotechnology and other technology divisions related to food, herbs, environment and materials. The ITI was inducted into the Network only two years ago. During my visit here in April 2013, it struck me as an ideal institution for South-South cooperation. The Institute has certain technical leads, especially in herbal technology, which can be shared by other countries, while there are a number of areas where collaboration with Network Members can lead to strengthen local programs. The institute has completed sixty years of its operations including the period when it was called 'Ceylon Council for Scientific and Industrial Research'. I present my heartiest congratulations to the administration and workers of ITI on this occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of their Institute. Sri Lanka as a country is also in the process of re-building and consolidating its institutions in the aftermath of long internal conflict. I am sure the new Government of Sri Lanka would be looking for new opportunities of international cooperation in various sectors of its economy, especially the energy, food and communications. If called upon to do so, COMSATS is ready to play a constructive role in this respect.

As is well known, COMSATS engages its Members in the fields of education; through offer of scholarships for graduate studies; it organizes workshops and hands-on training programs in key areas such as internet security, nanotechnology etc.; and it provides a forum for joint research through its International Thematic Research Groups. Other programs include, lectures by a group of COMSATS distinguished professors, science diplomacy through its science Ambassadors, and advice on science policy through its international panel of science policy experts. I am glad to report that a former Minister of Sri Lanka, Prof. Tissa Vitarana is a member of this policy panel. It may be mentioned here that the S&T policy 2008 of Sri Lanka is a fine example of policy that has clear objectives and well-defined strategies to achieve those objectives. The full implementation of the well-framed and well-meaning policies, unfortunately, remains to be a challenge for most developing countries, including Sri Lanka.

Well, in the next couple of days, there would be a lot of interactivity among visitors and local scientific community. I hope it would lead to some tangible follow-up cooperative actions. The meeting will be followed by a two-day international symposium on the "Impact of Extreme Atmospheric Events on Geo-surface in a Changing Climate". This symposium would also bring together local environmental specialists and regional experts. A special feature of the symposium is a side-line meeting of the COMSATS' International Thematic Research Group which is working on the theme of 'Climate Change and Environmental Protection'. The world-famous expert on environmental sciences, Prof. Zhaohui Lin is leading this project. Other group members belong to Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, apart from some other countries that are not members of COMSATS.

In the end, I once again thank all distinguished participants of the open inaugural session of COMSATS 18<sup>th</sup> Coordinating Council meeting. My deepest gratitude for the

honorable Minister for his kind patronage of the event and the generous hospitality offered to the delegates. The hard work done by the organizing committees both in ITI and COMSATS Headquarters are highly appreciated. I am sure their labors will results in a successful and productive meeting of the Council. Thanks for your attention.