

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

by

**MR. FAZAL ABBAS MAKEN, FEDERAL SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY, GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN**

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Executive Director COMSATS, Dr. Imtinan Elahi Qureshi
Chairman COMSATS Coordinating Council, Prof. Eduardo Posada
Rector COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Dr. S. M. Junaid Zaidi
Honourable Members of Coordinating Council
Excellencies, Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen
Assalam-o-Alaikum and Good Morning

It is my pleasure and honour to address this august gathering in the inaugural function of COMSATS Coordinating Council meeting, which is being attended by high profile scientists, responsible for running prestigious R&D organizations in their respective countries. On behalf of the Government of Pakistan, I welcome the delegates and thank them for holding such an important international meeting in Pakistan. I assure them that they will be extended full support of our Government and the best of Pakistani hospitality. I am glad to see that Pakistani R&D organizations and universities in Islamabad have been invited to attend this function to create awareness about the role of COMSATS Coordinating Council; a role that is a proud legacy of our most eminent scientist and Nobel Laureate Prof. Dr. Abdus Salam. As befitting his sharp intellect and deep insight, Prof. Salam believed that only S&T capacity-building can relieve the developing countries from bonds of poverty and underdevelopment and that this effort has to be undertaken by the developing countries, on their own. His life-long passion to cultivate S&T culture in developing countries led to the creation of the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Italy, now named after him as Abdus Salam ICTP. In Pakistan, his sagacious advice prompted The Government of Pakistan to play a key role in the creation of COMSATS as far back as 1994. The objectives of this organization and the mechanisms of their achievement are reflections of Salam's philosophy.

In the next two days, I believe the gentlemen who represent the scientific elite of their respective countries will share with each other how their organizations are helping their countries to achieve sustainable development. They will also come out, hopefully, with solutions to the perennial low S&T performance in most developing countries. The political leaders and civil servants in these countries are indeed conscious of the critical role that S&T plays in their development plans.

Dr. Qureshi has alluded to the potential use of science and technology as a means of projecting power in social, economic and military domains. I would like to reflect on a

different aspect of the relationship of science and society. In developing countries, the lives of common men and women are beset with myriad hardships, which are not necessarily due to lack of financial resources. The society expects that scientists will come out with scientific solutions to their problems. Also the governments expect that scientists would lead the way to economic prosperity. Is scientific community conscious of and capable of meeting the expectations of their governments and the general public?

By posing this question, I know that I am treading into the slippery grounds of discussions on basic vs applied research; on scientific output vs facilities provided; on incentives vs demands; on research vs innovation system; on political interference vs merit; on bureaucratic controls vs academic freedoms etc. etc. However, as we all know, the bottom line is that all segments of society, even with their conflicting and competing approaches and interests, should ultimately deliver tangible benefits to society, otherwise no individual domain of activity, including scientific R&D, can be considered as successful.

We have to remember that the expectations of a vast majority of populations in developing countries are very modest. People need clean water, hygienic living conditions, minimal dietary provisions and medical care for themselves and their animals. At a little higher level, there are needs of education, housing, transportation and affordable sources of energy. All strata of people with power and privileges have to answer why they cannot help society to meet these expectations. I do think that scientists are people of great privilege. They have the greatest asset a human being can have, i.e. the knowledge and intellect honed through long years of rigorous scientific training. Let this community ask themselves hard questions and lead the other segments of society through their example towards addressing the challenges faced by our populations.

Here I would like to share with you some of the recent initiatives taken by the present Government to ameliorate the R&D activities being taken up in the public sector. The Government is committed to follow action-oriented policies and plans in the spheres of Science Technology and Innovation (STI). Emphasis is being laid on quality research with required strategic and financial support together with overall improvement in the environment for R&D activities. The development of indigenous technologies and commercialization of R&D products has been given priority so that R&D in the public sector may be able to self-sustain, lessening its dependency on the government funding.

Further to this, our key emphasis is on capacity enhancement and provision of enabling environment for the highly skilled manpower in R&D Centers.

The government is giving impetus to establish effective linkages with private sector, to ensure prompt transfer of R&D recommendations for value addition in the manufacturing sector. To this effect focus has been on strengthening of MSTQ system for competitiveness, productivity and value addition of indigenous products and service

to comply with WTO regimes, special program to provide incentives for SMEs has recently been launched. The establishment of the Pakistan Halal Authority will certainly help to promote trade and commerce of Halal products and processes.

The present government has launched a historic Science Talent Farming Scheme. This scheme aims at achieving sustainable socio economic development through capacity building of Youth at school and college level having aptitude towards Scientific Research.

I invite all my colleagues at this forum to ponder upon how we can capitalize on Inter Governmental Organizations like COMSTECH and COMSTAS for bringing about economic revival through the means of Science and Technology, especially the emerging technologies for renewable energy, life sciences, water resources and agriculture. I call upon all my colleagues here to join hands, either bilaterally, or in small regional groups or through bigger institutional arrangements to put the enormous human and natural resource at our disposal for the benefit of our people.

I am glad to say that the Government of Pakistan considers it as an obligation to fellow developing countries to support COMSATS and will continue to bear the lion's share of its expenditures. It is a very useful platform, rendering its services most efficiently with minimum possible costs, resulting in tangible benefits to Member Countries. I appreciate the fact that the team at COMSATS Secretariat is small but efficient, sticking to their tasks with dedication and upholding high standards in all their activities. I am sure the COMSATS community all over the world recognizes the worth of this unique organization and would use its various platforms for facilitating South-South Cooperation in the best interest of all Member States.

Once again I extend my thanks and gratitude to the esteemed delegates and participants of the meeting and earnestly hope that will have fruitful deliberations and a memorable and pleasant stay at Islamabad.

Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen.