

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

by

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Honorable Federal Secretary, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of Pakistan, Mr. Fazal Abbas Maken

Executive Director COMSATS, Dr. I.E. Qureshi

Rector COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (CIIT), Dr. S.M. Junaid Zaidi

Dignitaries,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

To start with, I would like to express my profound regrets for not being able to personally participate in COMSATS Council meeting, especially being the Chairperson of this august Council. I have previously enjoyed Pakistani hospitality in the most beautiful city of Islamabad and I would have loved to come again, but unfortunately due to a serious health issue my doctor has advised not to make air travel. In view of this development I had to cancel my flight at the last moment.

Anyway, through this message I welcome all my dear colleagues from different Centres of Excellence.

These Centres are spread across four continents of the world: Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eurasia. Despite many financial and administrative variances, they are all driven by one basic vision, namely, the S&T-led socio-economic development of their respective countries. The challenges faced by all developing countries are very similar despite diversity of geographies and cultures and, therefore, common solutions can be sought, preferable through mutual help.

My Centre, International Centre for Physics (CIF), Bogota, is one of the three located in Latin America; the other two being International Centre for Environmental and Nuclear Sciences (ICENS), Jamaica, and EMBRAPA Agrobiologia, Brazil.

Latin America is well-known for its rich biodiversity. However, a lot of it is endangered due to climate change and urbanization related issues. The Amazonian forest that is home to many species of plants and animals is at risk of desertification. Issues such as water scarcity, coastal lines, global warming faced by the region are all too common in the rest of the world and the developing countries are generally under-resourced in handling them.

There is a dire need at regional and global levels to foster cooperation to reduce Greenhouse Gases Emissions, increase use of alternate energies, and implementation of massive reforestation programmes financed directly by responsible countries. Dependence on developed countries for aid and intellectual support helps but is not sustainable and comes at a cost of national integrity and security risks as well.

South-South cooperation has long been accepted as a complementary mechanism needed by the world to meet the development needs of the under-resourced parts of the world, and as the name indicates, it depends majorly on the cooperation between the developing countries themselves. COMSATS was specially created for this very purpose.

It is an organization established by the developing countries at their own initiative with specific objectives tailored towards their own developmental needs. Thanks to its international composition and to the quality of member centres, COMSATS can be a great instrument for bringing change in the developing world. We must direct all our efforts to strengthen this institution and improve its visibility and influence the decision-makers in our countries.

The Council, as you all know, is a very resourceful platform for South-South Technical Cooperation, with a number of specialties and strengths including industrial research and technology; S&T education; environment and climate change; water studies; agricultural research; mathematical modeling; physics; and chemical and biological sciences.

Five relatively new Centres , Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) (Bangladesh), Industrial Technology Institute (ITI) (Sri Lanka), Water Research and Technologies Centre (CERTE), University Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD)(Senegal) and Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (KazNU) (Kazakhstan) were inducted during the last 6 years, completing the vision of Late Prof. Salam of having 20 nodes in the Network. Induction of Mohammed V University, which will be considered for approval during next meeting will further enrich the Network's capacities and strengthen its operations.

Perhaps, the most important role being played by these centres is their participation in the International Thematic Research Groups of COMSATS, which are of great significance as per the COMSATS' strategy, re-endorsed by the COMSATS' Commission in the 3rd General Meeting held in Ghana.

The performance of the ITRG's has been significant, with 5 groups launching meaningful projects, i.e., e-Solutions for Community Using Low-cost Wi-Fi; Drug Discovery from Nature for Neglected Diseases; Characteristics and Mechanism of the Extreme Climate Events under the Climate Change Background; Mathematical Modeling and Simulation of Air and Water Pollution: Effects and Remedies; and Biotechnological Approaches to Improve some Wheat Lines Productivity under Biotic and Abiotic Stresses.

The intellectual and in-kind contribution of various centres for various capacity-building activities of COMSATS, is a constant support rendered by the Network. Contributions from two experts in COMSATS' Panel on S&T Policy, belong to NMC (Nigeria) and ICCBS (Pakistan) are also very crucial for achieving objectives behind establishing COMSATS.

Finally, I would like to laud the efforts of the Executive Director of COMSATS, Dr. I. E. Qureshi, and his co-workers at COMSATS Secretariat for managing the affairs of COMSATS with exemplary devotion. The news that Gambia is to join COMSATS is welcoming and is indicative of the expanding role of COMSATS. As I complete my tenure as Chairperson of the Council, I would like to make a special mention of my experience of working with Dr. Qureshi over the last six years. I found him to be a person of great integrity and professional skills. Under his leadership, COMSATS has consolidated its image as an international organization with high standards and strong impact.

I would like to conclude with a hope for very useful deliberations and best outcomes from the meeting. Thanks to all of You!!!

Good Day!