

**Introductory Remarks**  
**by**  
**Dr. I.E. Qureshi, Executive Director, COMSATS**

Honourable Minister of Education, Federal Republic of Nigeria  
Director General, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of Nigeria  
Director General, National Mathematical Centre  
Excellencies, Distinguished colleagues  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the National Mathematical Centre and the Government of Nigeria for organizing two important COMSATS meetings in Abuja this week. COMSATS was established with a mandate to promote capacity building in science and technology for achieving sustainable development in the countries of the South. The Consultative committee meeting of COMSATS is being held for the first time since its inception. It is, therefore, a unique opportunity for interactive dialogue among the senior officials of respective governments and a matter of pride for Nigeria to be the first host. I am grateful to all delegates of both Consultative Committee and Coordinating Council, who have kindly spared time to travel to Nigeria for these meetings. On behalf of COMSATS, I welcome all of you and sincerely hope that the deliberations of these meetings will be fruitful and productive, leading to a better vision for our future course of action.

Since joining COMSATS, I have vigorously engaged myself and my colleagues in an exercise of re-evaluation, re-consideration and fresh appraisal of the entire spectrum of our activities spread over the last fourteen years. I have found a number of satisfactory elements, but also some gaps that need our urgent and collective attention. I will briefly mention some of the aspects that can be considered commendable and some others that need to be improved upon. I am also looking forward to the guidance provided by worthy participants of the current meetings.

But, I must first start by stressing that we have in our joint control, an organization that has all the ingredients of a powerful instrument for change. It is

up to our collective wisdom to use this instrument for our common good. Please recall that the founders of COMSATS, who were the enlightened leaders of your great countries, envisioned a forum where they could chalk-out joint strategies based on the use of S&T for the socio-economic development of our people.

It was a clear mission aimed at empowering the countries of the South; the means to do so was identified as capacity building in S&T; and the way to move forward was decided to be the South-South Cooperation. A network of Centres of Excellence was provided for practical execution of this strategy. It is not very often that nations join hands to achieve common goals through common platforms. In this case the strong voice of Prof. Dr. Abdus Salam, and the visionary leaders of our countries provided us a platform, which is a prized asset and must be fully utilized to achieve our common objectives. I assure you that our team at COMSATS headquarters is fully capable and willing to undertake any task that is entrusted to us by member countries. As you are well aware, Prof. Salam was also the driving force behind other international initiatives aimed at the promotion of S&T in developing countries. The Academy of Sciences for the Developing World (TWAS), of which he was the founder President, and its Consortium on Science, Technology and Innovation for the South (COSTIS, formerly TWNSO) are the shining examples of his vision. COMSATS has had close working relations with these two bodies. The Executive Director of TWAS, who could not join us today, is also the Secretary General of COSTIS and the Chairperson of COMSATS Coordinating Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I must say that the use of S&T as an equalizer of the North and the South has been slow to come about. Within the South, new disparities are emerging and making it ever more necessary to offer helping hand to each other. The use of multilateral fora such as COMSATS is the best way to realize this task. Please remember that economically powerful countries have powerful multilateral arrangements to safeguard their interests and advance their policies. They are also capable of undertaking huge scientific projects like LHC of CERN and ITER. The least that the developing countries can do is to hold on to the fora they create and to see to it that their participation in these bodies is

meaningful. The social, scientific and political leaders of developing countries are often blamed for a disconnect between words and actions. It may be a valid observation, but I take it as an evolutionary process. From a voice-less majority, the developing world is now fairly conscious of what needs to be done and we are surely 'talking' about it. Some of the countries of the South have moved to the stage of taking actions with noticeable results; others will surely follow suit.

From COMSATS perspective, we are so pleased to note that the Government of Pakistan has never faltered from its commitment towards this organization. The entire expenditure of salaries and other establishment charges of COMSATS Secretariat have been borne by Pakistan as the host Government. In view of this we have been able to stick to our primary task of facilitating scientific cooperation, wherever the opportunities exist among our member countries. The annual report to be presented in the Coordinating Council will capture these activities. I will submit that all our activities are undertaken in collaboration with those organizations that are generously funded by their member countries such as ISESCO and UNESCO. Over the years we have developed three strong areas of expertise which are directly linked to socio-economic development. First, to ensure dissemination of information we have successfully mastered the web-portal techniques. The web-portals are a remarkable means of information exchange and interactivity. There are technical aspects of it, which are taken care of with the help of our COMSATS Internet Services and there are important aspects of content which are performed by a team at the Secretariat who carefully gather required information, organize it properly, compose it in a suitable form and then post it with the help of appropriate software. These services are available to any member country who may be interested.

Our second area of expertise is the provision of tele-health services. As a result of our successful experiences spanning more than 8 years, we are in a position to offer tele-health expertise to any member country who may wish to develop such facilities.

Thirdly, the greatest single achievement of COMSATS is the experience of Institution building in the field of Information Technology. As you may have known that one of our Centres of Excellence, namely the COMSATS Institute of Information Technology was started by COMSATS as a modest training centre in 1998 with about 300 students. This Centre has grown to become a major university of Pakistan with campuses in seven cities and over 14000 enrolled students. The University stands 7<sup>th</sup> among 124 in the national ranking of universities of Pakistan. The Rector of CIIT is here with us and he will be sharing his experience during Coordinating Council meeting of the remarkable growth of this institution. We offer both the expertise of developing IT institutions and the opportunities of studies at CIIT. Up to 100 scholarships are available for studying at CIIT by COMSATS member countries. We have shared this experience with Syria and prepared IT University feasibility report for Sudan. Likewise, another outstanding Institution which is the second Centre of Excellence of COMSATS in Pakistan, i.e ICCBS, offers research and training facilities of the standard comparable to anywhere in the world, in the fields of natural product chemistry and biology. COMSATS has been sponsoring students to study in these institutions. The Centre of Excellence in other countries are also an invaluable resource for training and exchange of know-how.

I consider it a very good sign that COMSATS has been steadfast in its mission of sensitizing the Governments of Member States to the centrality of S&T in development programmes. While making a presentation to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, who is the Chairperson of COMSATS, I did not hesitate to tell him that S&T spending in Pakistan have remained below the targeted level of 2% of GDP. I don't know when and if it will come about in view of multifarious difficulties of Pakistan, but at least the Prime Minister was kind enough to take note of my plea. Moreover, he immediately agreed to double the Government of Pakistan's contribution to COMSATS. While here in Nigeria, in the presence of the most honourable Minister and distinguished scholars and dignitaries of Nigeria, I will not miss the opportunity to say that being an oil-rich country Nigeria is in a much better position to spend more on R&D. Your human and natural resources are a power-house that can brighten the whole continent, and the key to unlock this

energy is technology. Some of your best friends are in the COMSATS' Member Countries. Please come forward to make technology alliances with them. In return, you can also give them the intellectual capital; a remarkable resource for this exists in the form of National Mathematical Centre. It is an outstanding institution, unique in many ways in the developing world. I have no hesitation to say that enhanced investment in NMC will be an investment in the brighter future for Nigeria. We also require your support for COMSATS so that we are in a better position to help Nigeria realize its broader regional and international role in S&T.

I also see it as a very healthy sign that Coordinating Council has been meeting regularly and providing valuable inputs for the working of COMSATS.

Dear Colleagues, We have to frankly admit that there are certain operational gaps in our set-up. I can cite three important aspects.

1. Unlike Coordinating Council, the other organs of COMSATS, namely the Consultative Committee, the Commission and the Technical Advisory Committee have not been able to meet according to planned frequency.
2. The voluntary contribution from Member States for the implementation of COMSATS programmes have been largely absent.
3. The interaction level between Secretariat and Focal Points and among Centres of Excellence has been, by and large, rather low.

I am glad to tell you that as a result of hectic efforts, we are in the process of filling some of these gaps. The Commission meeting has been scheduled for April 2010. The Consultative Committee is meeting today for the first time and TAC would be re-constituted soon. A newsletter has been launched with effect from the beginning of this year, with the intention of highlighting activities of the Secretariat as well as the Centres of Excellence on bi-monthly basis. There has been a flurry of e-mail messages sent by myself and my colleagues to the focal points and heads of Centres of Excellence in connection with the contributions

for the Newsletter. I urge all my colleagues, most respectfully, to please consider this Newsletter as a medium to offer as well as avail cooperation opportunities. We will be making some definite proposals in the Consultative Committee meeting to ensure the engagement of all our interlocutors who are approached by the Secretariat. We will make a strong case for the desirability of supporting the organization through financial contributions. We will also request the Consultative Committee members to sensitize their Government about forthcoming Commission meeting, and propose elements of its substantive agenda.

I have very high hopes, that the experienced technocrats that are meeting today, will be able to chalk-out an action plan for COMSATS to help us meet the financial and operational challenges. I urge all my colleagues to please use this special opportunity to give your candid analysis and practical advice, and make this meeting a turning point for COMSATS leading to a more focused and effective forum. The Consultative Committee will be chaired by a highly respected and experienced bureaucrat of Pakistan with university-level formal education in Science. He will be guided by your wise views and suggestions, which I hope will enhance the spirit of active engagement. The Coordinating Council is normally chaired by the Executive Director of TWAS. In his absence, I will request Prof. Sam Ale, who is a renowned scholar, to chair this meeting. I sincerely hope that under his chairmanship the Coordinating Council will thoroughly analyze the current status of Network and suggest improvements.

I wish good luck to both Chairpersons, and thank once again the commendable efforts that NMC has taken to organize these meetings. I also acknowledge with thanks, the hard work done in connection with the preparation of these meetings by my Colleagues, Mr. Tajammul Hussain, Dr. Hasibullah and Mr. Irfan Hayee present here, and those back in Islamabad.

I thank you for your attention.