

**INAUGURAL SPEECH BY DR. SAM O. EGWU, HONOURABLE MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF NIGERIA AND CHIEF GUEST AT THE OCCASION OF THE JOINT INAUGURAL CEREMONY OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> COMSATS' CONSULTATIVE AND THE 12<sup>TH</sup> COMSATS' COORDINATING COUNCIL MEETINGS BEING HOSTED BY THE NATIONAL MATHEMATICAL CENTRE, ABUJA, NIGERIA AT THE ABUJA SHERATON HOTEL AND TOWERS ON 27<sup>TH</sup> APRIL, 2009**

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors of Member and Potential Member countries here present;

The Executive Director, Commission on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the South (COMSATS), Dr. Imtinan Elahi Qureshi;

Honourable Ministers and representatives of COMSATS' Focal Points in member countries here present;

Distinguished members of COMSATS' Coordinating Council and Heads of Centres of Excellence here present;

The Host, Prof. Sam Ale, OFR, mni, Director General, National Mathematical Centre, Abuja; and Invited Members of the Scientific Community in Nigeria here present; Other Invited Guests; Gentlemen of the Press; Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

I feel highly honoured to be invited as a Chief Guest for the joint inaugural ceremony of the COMSATS' Consultative Committee and Coordinating Council meetings for sustainable development in the South. Most especially I am delighted by the bold steps taken by the National Mathematical Centre and the COMSATS' Coordinating Council to ensure the gathering together of the representatives of member-States who are COMSATS' focal points in member countries and Heads of 16 Centres of Excellence affiliated with COMSATS from around the third world countries in the city of Abuja, Nigeria,

I welcome all the delegates and participants to the 1<sup>st</sup> COMSATS' Consultative Meeting and 12<sup>th</sup> COMSATS' Coordinating Council Meeting. I also wish to commend the organizers of the programme for making today's event a reality.

Organization of international Consultative Committee and Coordinating Council Meetings such as these are very important because they do not only provide a forum for implementing COMSATS' objectives, but also provide political backing to scientific and technological initiatives of major concern to the South and to the significance of the Network of Centres of Excellence in building high-level scientific capacities in the South, among others. The Forum will also strive to create an environment that is conducive to science and technology development and thereby contributing to national well-being of member-countries, which are congruent with the seven point agenda and vision 20:20:20 of the administration of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of Nigeria.

Furthermore, the advantages of such meetings are also to encourage the stakeholders to fulfill their quota in the international scientific community, as well as to sustain the interest required to meet the challenges of the Millennium Development Goals, including capacity building in a globalized world through science and technology.

Permit me to state that the Federal Government has about a month ago, released a new roadmap, expected to guide my Ministry to address the myriads of challenges confronting the education sector. On my assumption of duty last December as the Minister of Education, I pledged to fashion out new policies that would enable the sector emerge from its declining status, especially on issues pertaining to Nigeria's Education for All (EFA) policy, infrastructural decay occasioned by institutional and legislative constraints. This became necessary because the sector is expected to play a pivotal role in meeting national commitments like the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and our road map would, among other issues, improve on accessibility to education, marked disparities in educational provision across and within zones and states, policy consensus, funding and a host of other challenges.

We note with concern the fact that the success to which other sectors of the economy goes, largely depends

on the extent to which education is given support, more so as the new road map, which is a strategic plan for responding to the challenges in the education sector, encapsulates inputs from the various parastatals, educationists and laudable initiatives by stakeholders.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, knowledge has become the main stay of most developed economies. You will agree with me that education must be accessible, equitable, qualitative and capable of impacting functional and life-long skills. For Nigeria, there is no gainsaying the importance of the study of Mathematics and Science in our quest to emerge as one of the twenty largest economies of the world by the year 2020. This goal is largely dependent on the development of human capital and significant development in science and mathematics education. After all, our ability to develop the requisite skills and competencies essentials to innovation and entrepreneurship is a function of our capacity to consistently produce individuals with sound analytical minds.

This position is confirmed by the prophetic statement by former Prime Minister of India, J. Nehru who believed firmly that science and technology capability represents the major difference in the development potentials of the developed and the developing world. For him ... "it is science alone that can solve the problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and, illiteracy of superstition and deadening custom and tradition of vast resources running to waste, of rich country inhabited by starving people. Who indeed could afford to ignore science today? At every turn, we have to seek its aid....The future belongs to science and those who make friends with science ". It is evident that countries that heeded this call rank amongst the most advanced in many development indicators.

The importance of this, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, is that no socio-economic transformation can take root in any nation without sound education and indeed, science and technology education. If it is true that Mathematics is the mother of science and technology, then it has become an imperative in modern education of any nation. As members of the third world countries therefore, we must embrace it not only as the language of the sciences, but also as an essential nutrient for thought, logic, reasoning and consequent progress.

As regulators of Nigeria's education sector therefore, we believe strongly that through policies that nurture the minds of our children, we can build a society where there is greater emphasis on citizenship and at the same time effectively compete globally. That is why our vision for the sector is to become an emerging economy model, delivering sound education policy and management for public good.

Central to the attainment of this vision is Science and Technology Education, Ladies and Gentlemen, Science and Technology represents a major pivot in the quest for transforming the country into one of the largest economies of the world by the year 2020. But this cannot happen unless we as a Government provide the platform for the design of a strategy for strengthening Science and Technology Education, first at the basic and post-basic levels of education. This is why our new basic education curriculum has incorporated computer appreciation and technology at both the Basic and Post-Basic levels of education. However, a sound science and technology curriculum does not necessarily translate into sound science and technology students. That is why special focus has also been placed on the special training of teachers in the mathematics and sciences. I am happy this is also in line with your mandates.

In arriving at his 7 point Agenda, Nigeria's President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, a scientist himself, had undertaken forensic analysis of the socio-economic problem of Nigeria and concluded that intensive investment in science and technology constitute the bedrock for the achievement of the primary objectives of NEPAD and of course, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Consequently, he had set the ball rolling by committing a substantial percentage of the 2009 budget to education, especially science education. At the core of science and technology discipline is mathematics. Mathematics plays a vital role in most modern life featuring in key areas such as, information and communications technology, medicine, economics, finance demography and planning and nano-technologies, genetics, etc.

Nigeria therefore needs to have well-trained mathematics, science and technology work-force in good quantity and quality in order to be an economic powerhouse and to use the latest technological solutions for the eradication of poverty and improvement in productivity levels. Indeed,

Nigerian President's 7- point agenda encompasses various areas of our national life: economic, political, social, cultural and security and for Nigeria's vision 20:20:20 to become a reality, efforts must be geared towards science education, research and development. This I believe is the bedrock for national development and growth.

We look forward to the COMSATS' meetings covering areas such as strengthening the coordination between Focal Points and Centres of Excellence within member states for facilitating the execution of programmes and activities of COMSATS as well as strategizing on how to conduct high level training activities, nationally, regionally and internationally, in the scientific fields of each node of the Network in order to achieve a critical mass of highly qualified personnel in these fields in the south. Planners and managers at the systems levels have been known to participate actively in solving national problems all over the world; it is only necessary that intellectuals are provided with COMSATS resource materials and tools needed to function adequately in order to contribute their quota to national development through their various activities and programmes. Such contributions can be realized through gatherings of this type which in turn results in skills and expertise acquisitions by stakeholders as well as providing an avenue where knowledge can be exchanged across the third world countries.

We are glad that Nigeria, through the National Mathematical Centre, Abuja, is privileged to host these COMSATS' meetings for the very first time. Indeed, this has become more imperative because we appreciate the importance of COMSATS in providing political backing to scientific and technological initiatives of major concern to the South and to the significance of the Network of Centres of Excellence in building high-level scientific capacities in the South and in enriching mutual cooperation between the North and the South in science and technology.

Once more, I sincerely congratulate the organizers of this Network for the major role they are playing in the economic transformation in the South. I am happy to note that COMSATS' Coordinating Council had among other things continued to strive to attract talent, induce competent third world scientists and technologists working abroad to return to their countries.

The National Mathematical Centre, Abuja, Nigeria is one of the most active Parastatals under my Ministry, and has recorded many ground breaking achievements in developing appropriate initiatives and resources of international standing for the re-awakening and sustaining of interest in the study of the mathematical sciences at all levels of Nigerian education strata. I am glad that the Centre is living upto her responsibilities and had since been nominated as one of the first ten nodes and an affiliate member of the COMSATS' Network of international Centres of Excellence in the mathematical sciences.

For our nation, Nigeria, to keep abreast with global trends of technological advancement and for our Centres of Excellence to achieve international recognition, the National Mathematical Centre Abuja, a parastatal of my ministry, which is also very relevant to the Science and Technology Ministry, will be further supported actively and encouraged by our administration to be more active in the programmes and activities of COMSATS' member countries for the betterment of our people.

It is my hope that this gathering would be the beginning of forging possible linkages, collaborations and partnerships in science and technology with Stakeholders based on this international cooperation. My plea to you all is to use the knowledge acquired at the COMSATS' meetings to solve some of the third world countries interdisciplinary research and modeling problems in order to devise scientific solutions to problems that have global implications for environmentally sustainable development. This is imperative because we have a duty to improve the standard of living of our people in order to move our third world countries to greater heights.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to once again, thank the Management of COMSATS for finding me worthy of being invited to the joint inauguration programme. I also want to specially commend Prof. Sam Ale, the Director General, National Mathematical Centre, and his able team for their untiring efforts in ensuring the successful hosting of COMSATS' international stakeholders together to realize the vision of COMSATS in training, research and capacity building with a view facilitating the transfer of technology and supply to industry of highly qualified technical personnel as well as in promoting joint technological ventures

amongst the members of the Network. I am confident that the COMSATS' Consultative Committee and Coordinating Council meetings will be rewarding and challenging. I wish the participants a very successful, stimulating and fruitful deliberation.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with greatest delight that I now inaugurate COMSATS' Consultative Committee and Coordinating Council meetings for the progress and promotion of the laudable objectives of the international organization to the benefit of the third world countries and the Glory of God.

Thank you and God bless.